




Boston's Histories

*Essays in
Honor of Thomas H. O'Connor*



Edited by
James M. O'Toole
and David Quigley

New foreword by Julie de Chantal

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ESSAYS IN HONOR OF
THOMAS H. O'CONNOR

Edited by James M. O'Toole and David Quigley

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Foreword to the Humanities Open Book Edition



Like many historians, I didn't plan on studying the history of Boston. I was born and raised in Montreal, Canada, and had little exposure to American history until I was in college. When I began to study the United States, I grew interested in the role of race and gender in shaping the nation. I figured that this would lead me to focus on the Southern states, or perhaps big cities like New York or Chicago. Boston had never even crossed my mind. This changed in 2004 during an undergraduate field trip to the Tercentenary of the Deerfield raid in Western Massachusetts. In a random conversation between events, another attendee remarked that almost no historians studied African Americans in Boston. Both surprised and intrigued by the comment, I was compelled to investigate its accuracy. I soon found myself reading the works of several of the authors featured in the collection that you are about to read. Their stories drew me in, sparked my interest in the city, and provided direction as I began to develop my own research agenda into Boston's African American community.

Though their topics were not necessarily related to my own, their stories presented me with new perspectives that helped to shape my research. For example, Sam Bass Warner's *Streetcar Suburbs* traced the history of the city's expansion, pushing me to consider the ways in which Bostonians moved as a key to understanding racial dynamics. Lois E. and James Oliver Horton's *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* and "Power and Responsibility: Entrepreneurs and the Black Community in Antebellum Boston" captured the vibrant life of the Black community and its

well-hidden class struggles. Their analyses led me to reevaluate the ways in which intergroup and interclass relationships operated in a community which amounted to less than two percent of the total city population. Sarah Deutsch's *Women in the City* and "The Politics of Sex and Race in Boston's NAACP, 1920-1940" bridged the divide between Black and white women during the turn of the century and helped me understand the critical role that women played in Boston-based grassroots organizations. James J. Connolly's *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism* and "*The Last Hurrah* and the Pluralist Vision of American Politics" challenged the ways in which I understood ethnicity and race in political belonging in the city. Lastly, I would be remiss to leave out Thomas H. O'Connor's own publications, which I used to build a solid foundation for my students when I taught my first course on the history of Boston.

James O'Toole's and David Quigley's preface to *Boston Histories* astutely describes the early historiography of the city as a "story line," a mythologized tale where the elites were front and center and the common people were relegated to the background. These are the laborers, clerks, street vendors, domestics, or simply mothers, whose names never appear in the newspapers. Their stories are hidden away in the rare journal or diary, in letters sent to friends or family, or passed down as stories to their children. The authors in this collection bring these stories to light, and by doing so, show a glimpse of the day-to-day life and struggles that "common" Bostonians faced. In this sense, the authors taught me an important lesson; to this day, the historiography on Boston remains very limited, and studying the city means being creative in locating and using sources that document Bostonians' daily lives. Furthermore, new research into the city must move beyond the traditional periodization. While most historians have focused on either the Revolutionary era, the Civil War, the Progressive Era, the urban renewal efforts, or the bus-ing crisis as critical moments in the city's history, we must also include the stories taking root between these pivotal periods as factors that shaped the Bostonian identity.

Thomas H. O'Connor remarks in his afterword to the 2004 edition of this book that Boston underwent important demographic changes which helped to shape its history. From a predominantly Irish Catholic and Anglo-Protestant city, Boston has become home to large Hispanic, Black, Asian, and

Southeast Asian communities, among others. Only recently have historians produced research on these communities and their influence on the overall history of the city. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez's article entitled "The 'Brown-coats' are Coming: Latino Public History in Boston" and James Jennings's "Puerto Rican Politics in Two Cities: New York and Boston" set the tone for a rich historiography that will surely break new ground in the years to come. In addition, works like Angel Amy Moreno's "An Oral History of Boston's Puerto Rican Socialist Party: 1972-1978" remind us again of the importance of creativity when traditional sources may not exist for a given community.

As historians untangle more of Boston's complex history, other demographic segments emerge that O'Connor may not have considered. Boston's LGBTQ community, for example, began to noticeably shape the city in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1974, Elaine Noble became the first openly lesbian candidate elected to a state legislature. More recently, in 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to recognize same-sex marriage. Historian Douglass Shand-Tucci has already shined light on the complex history of gay men within the hyper-masculine cultures of Boston's architectural world and Harvard University, with his books *Boston Bohemia, 1881-1900: Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) and *The Crimson Letter: Harvard, Homosexuality, and the Shaping of American Culture* (St. Martin's Press, 2003). These stories further complicate our understanding of the social fabric of the city, and challenge the predominantly ethnic-based historiography that historians have produced thus far.

New insight into one segment of Boston's history will often raise questions about other areas, reveal previously unknown connections, or present viewpoints that have yet to be considered. The work of one historian can be a guide for the next, even when their areas of research are seemingly disparate. My own research on Boston was undoubtedly shaped by the work of the historians highlighted in this collection. It is my hope that this digital edition of *Boston Histories* will be even more accessible to a new generation of historians, and that they will find the same inspiration and direction as I have from the stories featured within.

JULIE DE CHANTAL
Georgia Southern University

Preface



JAMES M. O'TOOLE AND DAVID QUIGLEY

*F*OR TWO DAYS in December 2000, more than one hundred students, colleagues, and friends gathered on the campus of Boston College for "Boston's Histories: A Conference in Honor of Thomas H. O'Connor." They had come both to celebrate and to continue the work of the man who had become the foremost scholar of the history of Boston. In a teaching and writing career that spanned fifty years, O'Connor had explored in depth the three and a half centuries of the city's history, presenting his conclusions with solid analysis and engaging prose. He had brought the history of Boston to a wide public audience, encouraging ordinary citizens to ponder the past as they addressed the issues of the present.

Echoing the intentions of Marc Antony, the participants had certainly not come to bury Tom O'Connor; he was an active participant in the discussion and the debates, and he spoke with well-wishers about the two or three new books he already had underway. Nor had the participants come to praise him in purely personal terms, though many in attendance could have done so at length, having benefited from his kindness and encouragement for years. Rather, the purpose of the gathering was to honor him by extending the study of his city's past. Some of the participants were former students, some were old friends, and all were among those whose own work had been aided and advanced by his. Even when historians disagree with one another, as they should, they are nonetheless in one another's debt—the work of each builds on that of others. So it has been with Tom O'Connor for all those studying the many histories of Boston. The papers from that conference, together with others prepared for this volume, are presented here.

The plural of the title—not Boston's history, but its various histories—was chosen deliberately. While the "story line" of the city's past

has long seemed simple and familiar, we are now recognizing that more complicated analyses are needed. From the first appearance of historical studies about Boston, the tale of the city's Yankee elites was the center of attention. The role of the founders and their descendants in establishing English settlement in America and then leading the movement for independence was the starting point; the rapid commercial expansion of the early nineteenth century seemed an open-ended tale of progress, the natural product of the earlier political energy. With the arrival of large numbers of immigrants before the Civil War—immigrants who were often seen wrongly as exclusively Irish—an easy caricature of a bipolar Boston emerged. Defined largely by ethnicity, social groups could apparently see only “us” and “them”—each term defined according to where one stood—and historians adopted the same outlook, especially as they explored the political history of the twentieth century. Historical forces and actors that did not fit the expected dichotomies were either ignored or marginalized, apparently mere exceptions that never undermined a more straightforward rule. Boston history continued to attract its devoted practitioners and readers, but much of it seemed merely to offer variations on the same traditional themes.

At the same time, though the enthusiasm for Boston history never flagged locally, it often seemed oddly cut off from the study of American urban history generally. As the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s inspired a renaissance in the study of the American city, scholars often looked elsewhere for their case studies. Critical urban scholarship on class formation and the history of gender seemed more likely to explore the streets of Manhattan or the wards of Chicago. Those urban studies that did explore New England looked to such places as Lynn and Woonsocket more often than to the region's hub. By the late 1980s, Boston's place in American urban history seemed increasingly marginal.

Over the past decade, however, Boston has come once again to occupy a more central ground. Two themes in particular—race and space—have been central to this renaissance in Boston studies. As urban historians have moved beyond older models of class formation, many have come to ask new questions about race and the American city. The works of Albert von Frank and Ronald Formisano have revealed the long and complicated history of race in Boston. At the same time, scholars like Sarah Deutsch, Gerald Gamm, and James Connolly have provided new insights into the city's past by thinking spatially about urban politics and social change. Interestingly, the new focus on race and space has led

much of this new scholarship back to the perennial themes of Boston history, namely the workings of local politics and the cultures of religious belief.

Six of the essays in *Boston's Histories*—those by Warner, von Frank, Giesberg, Kennedy, Deutsch, and Connolly—were presented at the conference in Chestnut Hill on December 1–2, 2000. “Power and Social Responsibility” first appeared in 1997. The rest were written for this collection. *Boston's Histories* opens with the conference keynote address, Sam Bass Warner Jr.’s moving reflections on Tom O’Connor’s historical practice as reflective of a generation. Warner celebrates O’Connor’s contributions while addressing the responsibilities of the democratic, urban historian. The volume concludes with O’Connor’s own reflections on the work presented here and on the scholarship still to be done.

The following essays recount selected moments and movements in the last two centuries of Boston’s history, focusing on the social and political dimensions of the city’s past. Alan Rogers explores the violent aftermath of Revolutionary debates over capital punishment in the early national period. Lois E. and James Oliver Horton’s contribution illuminates Boston’s antebellum black community by focusing on the role of black entrepreneurs. Albert von Frank uncovers the story of Thayer and Eldridge, publishers who were at the center of late-antebellum radicalism in Boston. The 1863 women draft rioters in Judith Giesberg’s study add to our understanding of O’Connor’s *Civil War Boston*. The essays by James O’Toole and David Quigley document the shifting landscape of postbellum Boston in the realms of urban Catholicism and local politics, respectively. Lawrence Kennedy’s exploration of the Irish Home Rule question lays out a Gilded Age city in the process of locating itself in a transatlantic world.

The remaining essays reflect the modern city itself, speaking to our current moment of transition between the older city of cliché and the more cosmopolitan, heterogeneous metropolis it is becoming. Kristen Petersen’s study of immigrant conversions brings together two of the traditional themes in Boston’s history—religion and immigration—but views them from a substantially new perspective. *Willett v. Herrick*—the legal case at the center of Mark Gelfand’s essay—opens a window onto larger questions of Progressivism and the evolving cultures of expertise in the early-twentieth-century city. Sarah Deutsch’s examination of the interconnected sexual and racial politics in the local NAACP illustrates evolving patterns of reform activism. James Connolly’s close reading of

The Last Hurrah, perhaps everyone's favorite novel about Boston, rethinks the history of the pluralist school of American politics. The final essays—William Leonard's account of the failure of Catholic interracialism and James E. Glinski's interpretation of the church's response to the desegregation of the city's public schools—assess the struggle for racial justice in the era of the busing crisis of the 1970s.

Together, the histories collected here are rooted in generations of scholarship, but they ask that we look at Boston through different lenses. And in keeping with the hallmark of Tom O'Connor's style—what Warner pinpoints as narrating “not a simple succession, but one of ever more complex interactions among the layers of the past”—the aim is to begin the work of synthesis. The range of partial histories combines to produce a different vision of the whole of Boston's past.

Acknowledgments



OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS, the editors have incurred a number of debts, first in organizing the December 2000 “Boston’s Histories” conference and more recently in completing this book. At Boston College, generous support has been provided by the History Department, Dean Joe Quinn and the College of Arts and Sciences, Dean Mick Smyer and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Jack Neuhauser and the Office of the Academic Vice President, Jack Dunn and Reid Oslin in the Office of Public Affairs, and the staff of the O’Neill Library. Peter Weiler, the chair of the History Department, offered critical early advice and assistance. Lynn Johnson, Mark Gelfand, and Alan Rogers served as commentators at the conference sessions. Lois Bilsky and Dave Early oversaw much of the logistical planning for the conference. Our undergraduate assistant, Jeff Prokop, aided the editors in countless ways. At Northeastern University Press, we thank Bob Gormley, Emily McKeigue, Tom Kozachek, and John Weingartner. Elizabeth Dion of the Museum of Fine Arts aided us in acquiring permission for use of Childe Hassam’s *Boston Common at Twilight*.

Boston's Histories



INTRODUCTION

O'Connor's Boston



SAM BASS WARNER JR.

WE ARE GATHERED HERE to celebrate Thomas H. O'Connor and to give fresh impetus to historical writing about Boston. Professor O'Connor has written many Boston histories, and on more topics than just the city itself: he has focused on the Civil War and Reconstruction, the ratification of the Constitution, religion in America, and the cotton mill men of Massachusetts. He has also written general histories of the United States. Yet not since the first generation of urban historians, Blake McKelvey of Buffalo and Bessie Pierce of Chicago, has anyone labored so faithfully and well on the history of a single city. The Boston histories began with his Bicentennial Boston Public Library lectures, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston*. Six books followed, to the latest, *Boston A to Z*. O'Connor writes so well, and he tells his stories with such relish that it is a pleasure to read his histories. I don't think you'd take *Streetcar Suburbs* to bed with you for a pleasant read. Maybe you'd leave it in the bathroom to chip away at, but Tom's books make a delightful evening's read.

Let me begin by acknowledging our shared generation and our common ideology. Tom and I are about the same age. He is from Catholic Boston, I from Unitarian Belmont. We know from our childhoods the waves of religious, ethnic, and color prejudice that enmeshed every family, neighborhood, and city in the Commonwealth, indeed the nation. In his book on South Boston, he speaks of Americans of different backgrounds working side by side, shopping at one another's stores, banding together in political campaigns, but "In personal and private affairs . . . each group was expected to stay with 'its own kind.' . . . The prospect of a marriage between an Irish boy and an Italian girl in those days . . . was apt to create as violent an explosion among members of both families as the shocking and unthinkable prospects of a 'mixed marriage' between a

Catholic and a Protestant."¹ When I married my wife of forty-one years, a Jewish girl from Brooklyn, the fireworks still ensued. In all of Tom's writing, and in mine, the theme of overcoming such prejudice is central. Because so much prejudice among whites, and even across color lines, has abated, we take this change in American society as one of the great achievements of our generation. And of course my young students have no idea what we are talking about!

No historian can write about everyone except in the most general terms. Tom has focused on Catholic Boston, Irish American Boston, and the relationships of these people and their institutions to the leaders of Anglo Boston. Peter Knights' small town New England migrant, or the Canadians, are not in his scope. He brings to his concentration a particular ideology. He shares with me the belief that the proper test of a city is the well-being of all its inhabitants, the least among us as well as the most visible. Such an important democratic commitment informs all his histories.

What then is O'Connor's Boston?

He thinks the city is a special place because of its long accumulation of historical events and the sequence from Puritan to liberal Protestant, to Catholic, to the present secular and multireligious configuration. Boston is unique because of its mixed settlement: first English and African American, then Irish, then Italian and Eastern European and Canadian, and now all the foregoing plus Asian and Caribbean. The process is, for him, not a simple succession, but one of ever more complex interactions among the layers of the past. The different ways of living and special institutions of these people as they settled one after another give Boston its special flavor. The action for O'Connor, however, does not take place at these general sociological levels, but, for him, history is propelled by individual actors whose stories he tells.

When I was a graduate student in history many years ago, the bookstores held many more shelves of history books than they do now. Over the years, as we historians have become more and more abstract and conceptual (may I be allowed to say, more academic?), the public has tired of us, and fewer histories are in stock. O'Connor has fortunately continued in the old narrative ways.

Let me review three of O'Connor's books with you. They are part of a sustained burst of productivity: *South Boston: My Home Town* (1988), *Building a New Boston* (1993), and *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (1997).

South Boston is an important book not only for Bostonians but all Americans, because it is a story often repeated across the land in our cities and small towns. It is the story of not being able to see a fellow human being when you look at a stranger. O'Connor's narrative covers the entire history of the settlement from the first Dorchester cow to the arrival of the Tactical Police Force. Geography is key. South Boston is a peninsula of six hundred acres, a place, according to the 1990 census, of 29,500 inhabitants. At its peak, in 1920, the same area held almost three times as many people.²

Like other areas in the city, South Boston passed through a residential boom, in this case around the middle of the nineteenth century, and then it filled out with Irish immigrants and their children, who settled there to be near the Fort Point Channel industrial area, the port, and the downtown. Although newer immigrants settled there too, especially Poles and Lithuanians, when the Irish replaced the Anglos on the peninsula, they became the overwhelming cultural and institutional presence.

In his chapter, "My Home Town," which he takes from the song of the same title, O'Connor lovingly describes the domestic and religious rituals of the neighborhood during the 1920s. He chronicles the coming of the civic monuments, the beach and boathouse improvements, the ups and downs of popular baseball and football teams, and the succession of Catholic devotions that organized families' annual calendars.

Eighty years ago priests were given life tenure to their parish churches, so that they came to be something like members of an extended parish family. Young women who sought an alternative to marriage and domestic life as nuns staffed the parochial schools and the nurse's stations. This religious matrix was further reinforced by many social and athletic clubs, which also undergirded the political organizations of the time. For some reason, in South Boston, these clubs did not coalesce around a single political leader, but instead carried on in factions.

The clubs are an issue I would have liked O'Connor to have explored further. From the Civil War to the Great Depression, the men's club flourished in the United States: the Odd Fellows, the Grange, the Masons, the Elks, and the Eagles were everywhere. The women's club movement arose in parallel. Alex von Hoffman's Jamaica Plain is full of such social life.³ The sudden rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was an ugly manifestation of that same impulse. Is not such past fearfulness evident in the South Boston Hibernians' recent refusal to admit homosexuals to their St. Patrick's Day Parade?

Altogether O'Connor offers a believable re-creation of twenties South Boston as an industrious community of workers, shopkeepers, and live-at-home mothers. It was a residential neighborhood tied together by religious and secular rituals. His description is also an element in the South Boston myth that must find a place in the panoply of myths defining the public consciousness of Boston. He writes:

The lower end had many day laborers, longshoremen and tavern-keepers, grocers, industrial workers and bricklayers, while east of Dorchester Street lived carpenters, plumbers, electricians, streetcar conductors, policemen, firemen and letter carriers. Whatever their occupation, parents worked hard, took pride in their jobs and raised their children to admire the working-class values of hard work and determination despite modest homes and meager incomes.⁴

O'Connor tells us that the police strike of 1919 started the destruction of the "happy island" arrangements of South Boston. The neighborhood turned against its own strikers, and social and religious ritual did not contain the violence of the neighborhood's unruly toughs. Yet the fact that the striking policemen were mostly Irish pitted South Boston's Irish loyalties against the hostility of Governor Coolidge, Mayor Peters, and Commissioner Curtis—Anglos all—and practitioners of the contemporary Red Scare.⁵ Year after year, the core elements of South Boston culture fell away. First the radio and then the talking film invaded. Young people began their exodus to the suburbs during the twenties. The industrial decline of New England that started in 1921 matured into the collapse of the thirties. After World War II, South Boston emptied out rapidly. It became a place where your grandparents lived, with old-fashioned houses and old-fashioned manners. Now, to bring O'Connor's history down to the present, we have the devastating report of the recent leadership of the community from Michael Patrick MacDonald in *All Souls*.⁶

I leave to others more expert than I the definitive analysis of busing for school integration. It was, to my mind, a case of driving the children about to do what the adults were unwilling to do. O'Connor carefully lays the framework for understanding by defining the isolation of the South Boston community. For us, tonight, let me suggest that our problem now is to think of ways to incorporate the city's racism into a Boston myth that would make us all proud. Let me suggest a few examples.

First, think of the small-town novels from Hamlin Garland's *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) to Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1921) and *Babbitt* (1922). If small-town America was becoming a suffocating place, how could inwardly turning South Boston escape a similar fate? By the same token, John Marquand's *The Late George Apley* (1937) also depicts a Boston of life-threatening conventionalities. Those of us who are interested in the environments of nature often say that nature hates uniformities and monocultures. Might not the same maxim apply to human affairs?

While South Boston was basking in its cultural homogeneity, President Abbott Lawrence Lowell of Harvard was setting quotas against Jews and seeking clubable gentlemen for faculty. It was only after his regime that a young chemist from the Ashmont section of Dorchester, James Bryant Conant, opened up Harvard to the larger world. Thus, I would place South Boston in the larger contemporary context of the twentieth-century retreat from an inclusive democratic imagination.

For me, the opposing example lies in Brighton. There, a poor boy began to make something of himself as an entertainer. When he prospered a bit, he purchased for the aunt who raised him a three-decker off Dorchester Avenue in St. Margaret's parish. By dint of a great deal of patient hard work, Fred Allen advanced to become a Broadway stage and later a national radio entertainer. Part of his stock-in-trade was his refashioning of a neighborhood variety store (Hodge White's) into a fictional meeting place where Allen could mock contemporary stereotypes. Fred (Sullivan) Allen's life tells of alternative Irish American paths that many of his contemporaries found. He married, by the way, a young woman, Portland Hoffa, whose father was a Jew and whose mother was a Presbyterian. Such were the demands of the era that Portland converted to Catholicism.⁷

Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950-1970, is O'Connor's tribute to the postwar generation of young people. It's about the elsewhere Boston, not the South Boston Irish. It's about Roxbury, Dorchester, West Roxbury, Brighton, and East Boston Irish, Italians, Jews, Anglos, and African Americans. These were the young people who absorbed the New Deal as children and thereby learned that big government can help with commonplace circumstances. During World War II, teams of young technical experts directed armies and navies and invented a catalog of new armaments that ultimately brought the GIs to

victory. Young men and women from even the most isolated families and encapsulated neighborhoods traveled across the nation and the world to work and fight beside strangers whose qualities lay far beyond their most far-fetched stereotypes. O'Connor argues, effectively I think, that this new experience and outlook underlay the enthusiasm and hopes for the making of a new Boston. Surely those were also years of a widespread hunger for newness: new cars, new houses, new appliances, something fresh after fifteen years of economic depression and world war. As chance would have it, the architects stood ready with a new design fashion, one particularly suited to commercial buildings.

The path from James Michael Curley's theatrical politics of anger and personal patronage to an orderly municipal process that investors could rely upon proved slow and difficult for Boston. That political path is the core of O'Connor's story in this book. First Mayor Hynes defeated Curley, and then Mayor Collins defeated Senator John Powers. Many voters perceived both these losers to be symbols of the old failed Depression ways of corrupt Boston politics.

The new regime resembled the era of Mayors Hugh O'Brien and Patrick Collins during the late nineteenth century, a time of very active municipal construction of parks, schools, and transit. In those days O'Brien and Collins presided over Irish Yankee downtown and neighborhood coalitions. During the 1950s and 1960s, the coalitions included Italians, Jews, and African Americans, as well as their Irish base. This era especially marks the end of the hitherto ceaseless Protestant-Catholic animosities. O'Connor also tells of the early mistakes, the West End and New York Street clearances, and the process of learning that in time successfully refashioned the waterfront, Charlestown, and the South End on a preservationist model.

After his narrative of urban renewal, O'Connor challenges his readers by noting the contemporary absence of civic vision among the succeeding generations. He writes:

By the late 1970s and early 1980s . . . the "vital flame" of municipal leadership had begun to burn low in terms of providing the source of energy needed to inspire any greater vision and to effect any more substantive changes in either the appearance of the city or the quality of life of its citizens. The depressing struggle over urban renewal, followed by the physical and emotional exhaustion of the busing crisis, drained the city of its will and deprived the neighborhood of its energies.⁸

It is a fine concluding paragraph, but perhaps now, eight years later, it is time to reframe the historical question. Suppose the issue were not urban renewal, but instead the place of the city of Boston in its region and the nation. Think for a moment of the conflict between local and regional planning. In 1960 Governor Foster Furcolo, Mayor Collins, and Ed Logue, of the BRA, were struggling to launch the crucial Prudential project, the essential beginning upon which all hopes for a fresh downtown depended.⁹ At the same moment, though, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the federal government were far along with their rearranging of the settlement pattern of the entire area of eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. In the name of traffic planning, Route 128 was designed in 1953 and completed in 1957 (rebuilt in 1963). As the Faneuil Hall–Quincy Market reached completion, the outer-ring highway, I-495, passed Mansfield in its progress to completion at Wareham. These two freeways, and the accompanying rebuilding of the rails and roads of the Boston half-spiderweb (1950–1965), transformed the region into one vast real estate market. Here, since the sixties, is where we have been locating the new jobs, building the new homes, and creating more office space than what lies within the towers of the city of Boston. What does this new regional pattern foretell? What vision for Boston and its region would be appropriate? As yet none are forthcoming. As O'Connor put it: "Businessmen returned quietly to their boardrooms; financiers disappeared into their vaults; the clergy discovered the comforts of a wall of separation; the universities became more involved in tenure decisions than urban planning."¹⁰

In the absence of a fresh vision, the pall of the two Bostons hangs over the city and the new automobile region. For many years the research director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Alex Ganz, published two sets of studies. In one set he proved himself an uncanny estimator of future demand for commercial office space. In the second he repeatedly warned of the growing disparity between the two halves of the city—the prosperous new core and the impoverished fringes. In recent years the gap has widened.¹¹ Nor is Boston's situation the most desperate. All the old cities of the region from Nashua, New Hampshire, to Lawrence, Fall River, and New Bedford suffer the same disparities. It is a cloud that hangs heavy.

Civil War Boston (1997) continues O'Connor's earlier work on the Cotton Whigs, but its structure rests upon a much more complex base, and the narrative is his most ambitious, since the settings range from the

North End to New Orleans. The groups he follows are four: Boston merchants and mill owners, the Irish Catholic and African American communities, and the small cluster of women reformers. The book opens where the South Boston book closed—with yet another reenactment of the white-black racial script. This particular bit of historical theater starts with Judge Lemuel Shattuck's denial of school access and his invention of the separate-but-equal doctrine. It finishes with Justice Taney's *Dred Scott* decision, in which he denies the humanity of African Americans.¹² Accompanying these events, like a kind of chorus, the white citizens of the United States and Boston repeat their centuries-old formulas of blacks as clowns or savages.

Following upon this civic reenactment, *Civil War Boston* takes an unexpected turn. During these prewar years, the city and the state experience a kind of civil rights movement. The legislature forbids segregation in railroad cars, opens school access, and cancels the previous laws against marriage between whites and blacks.¹³ Yet, such progress toward democracy goes forward in a climate of intense political division over the abolition of slavery. This climate is suffused with what we would recognize today as white racism, even among committed abolitionists.

It is upon this conflicted base that O'Connor builds his narrative. His is a story of sustained popular participation in the Civil War and energetic Boston leadership in the conflict. How might such enthusiasm be accounted for? What might it mean, then and now?

My guess is that the meaning of O'Connor's narrative lies beyond the facts he has so artfully assembled. Of course, my guesses are based on the selection of materials he has made. My instincts tell me that Civil War Bostonians were part of a strong mythical force, one that they were immersed within and one that their actions helped to refashion.

Consider the problem of the participation by common citizens: the repeated volunteering for the army and navy. Consider the special case of the widespread Irish American participation, despite the opposition of the *Pilot* and many Democratic politicians whose virulent racism and objections to the war and to Lincoln pointed in quite the opposite direction. Why did so many Irish Bostonians serve?

The answer to these historical questions, I think, lies in the pervasive romantic nationalisms of the era. Nationalism calls for the believer to merge his sense of self with an idea of a national being, a nation-state. Boston's literary men and women, its historians, poets, novelists, and essayists had long and vigorously written within this tradition. I think

Irish immigrants and Irish Americans shared such an idea with their Protestant opposites. During the Civil War, O'Connor shows us, Irish nationalism fused with American nationalism. They could rest side by side, without the latter displacing the former. O'Connor is perplexed because the Irish were so anti-African American. I am also perplexed. I think part of the answer lies in the situation of Ireland. Is it heresy to observe that the Irish were provincial Englishmen and thus shared their prejudices? After all, Ireland lay far away from the new liberal industrial consciousness of Birmingham and Manchester. It was in Manchester that workingmen erected a bust of Abraham Lincoln. Undoubtedly there were other elements to Irish prejudice. In any event, we human beings are notorious for our ability to hold simultaneously two or more opposing ideas, and nationalism has the very sort of vague emotional appeal that can leave contrary ideas undisturbed.

Thus, I'd place O'Connor's *Civil War Boston* in the context of the history of common people, the ordinary Yankees and Irish, the African Americans, and the women reformers. All these groups were at that time in motion. Many were not yet voting citizens, and all lay outside leadership circles. As common people actively engaged in the war, they both reinforced and refashioned the meaning of the United States as a nation. Such an interpretation is just what Walt Whitman had in mind in *Democratic Vistas* (1871). I think this is the meaning of O'Connor's Boston history, too.

Does this legacy of the past still carry force in our own time? Surely it was an element in the civil rights movement. When the school busing conflict came to Boston the city answered, no matter how awkwardly, by saying that Boston is still a place that is open to strangers and newcomers. That answer, like the Civil War itself, said that Bostonians still move within the emanations of that mythical national document, the Declaration of Independence. It is a cherished statement of goals that our nationalism strives toward, although the city and the nation repeatedly fall short of its realization.

Notes

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1. *South Boston, My Home Town: The History of an Ethnic Neighborhood* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988), 172-73.
2. 80,000. *Ibid.*, 86.
3. Alexander von Hoffman, *Local Attachments* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
4. *South Boston, My Home Town*, 125.
5. *Ibid.*, 165-70.
6. Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).
7. Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Province of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 44-45.
8. *Building a New Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 299.
9. *Ibid.*, 176-77.
10. *Ibid.*, 299.
11. For an update, see The Boston Foundation, *The Wisdom of Our Choices, Boston's Indicators of Progress, Change, and Sustainability*, 2000 (Boston, 2000).
12. *Civil War Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 21-29.
13. *Ibid.*, 51.

I

"A Long Train of Hideous Consequences" *Boston, Capital Punishment, and the Transformation* *of Republicanism, 1780–1805*



ALAN ROGERS

MASSACHUSETTS IMPOSED the death penalty on more convicted felons in the two decades following the enactment of its constitution than during any other twenty-year period in its history. Between 1780 and the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency of the United States, seventeen men and one woman were legally executed in Boston and an additional sixteen men were put to death elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The hangings were in response to a postwar crime wave and to the widespread fear that the bonds meant to hold society together were not strong enough nor the people virtuous enough to sustain a republic. Confronted by a rising tide of violence, some people held firm to the conviction that the government must execute criminals to deter others from committing criminal acts in order to build an orderly, virtuous society. Others feared that aggressive state action would sacrifice individual liberty to the demands of political and legal order. The Republic must protect its citizens, but it also must fulfill the promise of republicanism and ensure equality before the law and justice for all.¹

Before the Revolution, Massachusetts's clergy played a major part in rationalizing capital punishment. Buttressed by religion, colonial executions engendered little public discussion. After 1780 the clergy's primacy gave way to the law, the courts, and the people. The courts initially responded to the challenge of maintaining order and achieving republicanism with an unbending enforcement of criminal laws. Within a relatively short time, however, popular opposition to capital punishment surfaced, and a heightened concern for the preservation of liberty strengthened the idea that an accused individual ought not to be

punished before having been given every opportunity to establish his or her innocence.

The Massachusetts Constitution's Declaration of Rights was the starting point for change. Opponents argued that capital punishment was brutish, British, and beyond the powers delegated by the Constitution to the new republican government. Article 12 of the Declaration of Rights spelled out a defendant's right to due process, including a full explanation of the charges, a prohibition against self-incrimination, a right to confront the state's witnesses, a right to counsel, and the right to trial by jury. Article 26 forbade a magistrate or court of law from inflicting "cruel or unusual punishment." Article 29 held out to every citizen the right "to be tried by judges as free, impartial and independent as the lot of humanity will admit." Using these constitutional ideals, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) took the lead in protecting and expanding a defendant's rights, and in the process republicanism was transformed. For this reason, the debate surrounding Boston's postwar executions provides a window into the development of a liberal commonwealth. The rash of court-ordered executions was followed by a remarkable change in the law's purpose and practice. By the early nineteenth century the notion that the law's chief function was to be the guardian of liberty was firmly in place, reinforced by the popular belief that an unchecked use of the death penalty was un-American.²

In 1780 the Reverend Samuel Cooper, a lifelong Bostonian, told the lawmakers gathered for the first meeting of the Great and General Court, "Nothing can render a commonwealth more illustrious, nothing more powerful, than fueling the sacred fire" of liberty. But the Boston town meeting worried that Massachusetts's new republican government would not be able to protect liberty or to prevent anarchy. In 1786 the meeting sent a circular to every Massachusetts town, warning of the imminent danger of "a state of anarchy," a turn of events "to be dreaded above all other calamities because there is no evil which it does not involve." Boston's anxiety did not deter lawyers from sprinkling high-flying rhetoric about the importance of liberty in their arguments before the court; nor did it prevent judges from responding in kind. James Neale urged Attorney General Robert Treat Paine to determine "points of liberty and justice" with an eye to the rights of all men, and in 1805 the SJC vowed to act "with that anxious regard for personal liberty and to prevent vexatious oppression."³

Most men living through the tumultuous post-Revolutionary era

linked attacks on government by unruly mobs and the increase in the incidence of theft and violent crime. Lawyers buttressed this popular perception by citing Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, the most important source of legal authority in Anglo-America. According to Blackstone, violent criminal acts violated "the laws of nature" and "the moral as well as the political rules of right," because they "endanger[ed] the subversion of all civil society." Governor John Hancock summarized this argument when he told the legislature the primary purpose of criminal law was to achieve "the good order of Government and the security of the people."⁴

Writing in 1788, lawyer and historian George Minot highlighted new attitudes about wealth as the root cause of social instability. "An emulation prevailed among men of fortune to exceed each other in the full display of their riches," he wrote. "This was imitated among the less opulent classes of citizens and drew them off from those principles of diligence and economy, which constitute the best support of all government." The Massachusetts legislature also emphasized the dark side of Boston's new prosperity. "Habits of luxury have exceedingly increased and we have indulged ourselves in fantastical and expensive fashions [and] the virtue which is necessary to support a Republic has declined," bemoaned the legislature in 1786. Judge Nathaniel Sargeant made explicit the connection between the decline of virtue, political instability, and theft: "Vicious persons [are] roving about the countryside disturbing peoples rest and preying upon their property," snarled the justice.⁵

Modern historians searching for the causes of postwar Boston's political anxiety and its increased rate of crime and violence have identified the decline of civic virtue and the problems accompanying the emergence of liberal capitalism. William Nelson and Daniel Cohen focus, respectively, on the decline of the government's interest in imposing a set of community values and the rise of a consumer culture. Adam Hirsch ties many of these same changes to the invention of a prison system. This essay focuses on capital punishment in Boston and complements the argument made by the scholars named above. I argue that Massachusetts's post-Revolutionary experience with crime and capital punishment was formative. Specifically, the debate that swirled around capital punishment accelerated the process linking the protection of liberty to the elaboration of criminal due process. Changes made in the criminal law both contributed to and were affected by the transformation

of republicanism and eventually gave rise to a major campaign to abolish the death penalty in Massachusetts.⁶

Political controversy and strife pockmarked the 1780s, conditions that often led to discussion of capital punishment. Daniel Shays's western Massachusetts uprising was sandwiched between divisive debates over the shape and scope of the Massachusetts Constitution and of the United States Constitution. The collapse into anarchy predicted by Loyalists in 1776 did not occur when Massachusetts became an independent state primarily because town governments provided a practiced, steady hand of authority. Still, fear of impending chaos and the promise of republicanism created a clamor for a new state constitution. The people of Massachusetts had rejected constitutions in 1776 and 1778 chiefly because they had been drafted by the legislature. A town meeting of nearly one thousand Bostonians unanimously insisted that a constitution must be drafted by a specially elected convention. The Massachusetts legislature acquiesced to the voice of the people, and a constitutional convention gathered in Boston on September 1, 1779, for the "sole Purpose of forming a new Constitution." The delegates quickly and easily agreed that the "government to be framed by this convention, shall be a free Republic." John Adams filled in the details. His draft constitution and Declaration of Rights was sent to the people for their "candid Consideration." On June 15, 1780, the convention resolved that the people had accepted the constitution. Samuel Adams heaved a sigh of relief, saying that "never was a good constitution more needed than at this juncture."⁷

No sooner was the Commonwealth launched, however, than the people of Maine rallied for separation from Massachusetts, and hard-pressed western Massachusetts farmers rose up in rebellion in the fall and winter of 1786-1787. To Bostonians the Maine convention was "odious, fraught with evil and danger," an ominous threat to the fragile republic. Maine separatists contented themselves with a resolution, but many Bostonians suspected western Massachusetts farmers of plotting rebellion in secret alliance with the British. A special Boston town meeting charged Samuel Adams with writing a circular to be sent to all the other towns condemning the westerners' "illegal steps" and raising the specter of "British emissaries residing among us." Wild rumors circulated that Captain Daniel Shays was raising an army to invade Boston. With the "universal good wishes of the people of Boston" General Benjamin Lincoln crushed the rebellion and restored order to the Commonwealth.⁸

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Bostonians were divided about whether the insurgents should be executed. "A plenty of hemp," wrote the *Independent Chronicle*, "would certainly cause terror to evildoers and would have a direct tendency to promote good order in the community." It seemed as though that was the state's strategy. At Northampton on June 21, 1787, two convicted rebels, fifty-three-year-old Jason Parmenter and Henry McCulloch, aged thirty-six, walked to the gallows surrounded by more than one hundred militiamen. The "death parade" paused long enough to listen to a sermon preached by the Reverend Moses Baldwin before stopping at the gallows. Wearing nooses around their necks, Parmenter and McCulloch climbed the scaffold as the huge crowd stood silent. At the last moment Sheriff Elisha Porter read a reprieve, sparing the lives of the two men.⁹

Boston attorney James Sullivan was responsible for saving the men's lives. He had argued for clemency before the Executive Council. "Peace and tranquility could be restored without sanguinary examples," he told the councilors. "Even Britain," Sullivan said, "whose sanguinary disposition daily gluts the grave with legal consignments," offered clemency in such cases. "Honestus" agreed. Merciful treatment of the Shaysites would be a "more eligible mode to restore our public tranquility than a severity of punishment." Samuel Adams thought differently. "In monarchies," he wrote, "the crime of treason and rebellion may admit of being pardoned or lightly punished; but the man who dares to rebel against the laws of a republic ought to suffer death." By using its ultimate power the state would reestablish civic virtue and buttress order in a fragile republic, concluded Adams, a voice in the wilderness.¹⁰

Just one year following Shays' Rebellion, another political question divided Massachusetts. With one class often pitted against another, patriots were divided over whether to ratify the United States Constitution. Support for the Constitution came from commercial and professional classes in the coastal communities. In Boston these groups were joined by sailors, longshoremen, and artisans, who believed that only a strong national government would stimulate commercial prosperity, provide protection against inflationary paper money, and stamp out lawlessness. Farmers across the Commonwealth, on the other hand, were suffering through a postwar depression and feared that the proposed federal union would place even more power in the hands of a wealthy elite. But after six weeks of debate the Federalists managed to peel away enough anti-Federalist delegates so that Massachusetts ratified the United States

Constitution by a slim margin. But while thousands of Bostonians celebrated the birth of national republicanism, other men and women broke open warehouses, accosted their fellow citizens on the town's streets, and sometimes, enraged with drink, committed murder.¹¹

Along with political instability, economic prosperity also contributed to Boston's escalating rate of violent crime. With the end of war, thousands of newcomers poured into Boston, rapidly pushing up the town's population from a low of 10,000 in 1780 to nearly 25,000 by 1800. In the process, the once ethnically homogenous community became far more diverse. Thousands of men and women from other states as well as immigrants from Europe, Canada, and the West Indies flowed into Boston. This remarkable growth spurt brought a building boom, employment opportunities, and upward mobility for many. For unskilled workers, however, low pay and the difficulty of finding steady work resulted in an extraordinarily high rate of transience and periodic unemployment. Some of these men and women at the bottom of the economic ladder turned to crime. For example, two-thirds of the 244 repeat offenders sentenced to prison from 1785 to 1798 whose occupations were listed in court documents were laborers. When Henry Tufts arrived at Castle Island prison in 1794 he described his fellows as "a motley crew, consisting of different kinds of people, as well black as white, and of divers nations and languages." They were, Tufts added, "the mere dregs of human nature; the refuse and offscouring of the whole globe."¹²

Of course, neither crime nor punishment was a new phenomenon. Capital crimes and executions were not uncommon in prewar Boston. Thirty-six men and women—sailors, servants, African American slaves, pirates, and army deserters—were hanged on the Boston Common during the seven decades prior to the formation of the Commonwealth. Excluding the twenty-one men executed for piracy or desertion from the army, ten men were hanged for murder, four for burglary, and two for arson from 1705 to 1778. In the two decades after 1780 a very different pattern emerged: the rate of executions throughout the Commonwealth nearly doubled and the crimes for which men and women were put to death changed dramatically. Of the seventeen men and one woman executed in Boston during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, only four were convicted murderers; nine were burglars and five highway robbers—almost the reverse of the data for the first seven decades of the century.¹³

Authorities rushed to legitimize their use of this terrible power and,

for the first time in Massachusetts's history, to imprison the worst offenders for long terms. Religion continued to play a role at executions, but republican officials moved quickly to bolster their part in the ritual. To reinforce the law's power and prestige a "Grand Procession of Court and Bar" paraded down State Street to the courthouse in February 1785. The *Exchange Advertiser* reported the event:

Yesterday, about twelve o'clock the procession was begun from the house of Mr. Perez Morton, in State Street, in the following manner: The under sheriffs, constables, etc. with their staffs [led off], Joseph Henderson, Esq. high sheriff, the clerks of the supreme judicial court in their black gowns, their honors the judges in the robes of scarlett, the Hon. Robert Treat Paine, esq. Attorney General, [and] the barristers in their professional dress closed the procession each ranked according to his seniority.¹⁴

Just eight months after the parade, the state's first prison was opened. On a warm, late October day three prisoners were rowed across the narrow channel separating mainland Boston from Castle Island. A cluster of old military buildings had been recycled as a prison, ringed with a fence and guards. Over the next thirteen years more than 300 repeat offenders—165 of whom were unskilled laborers—were imprisoned on the island.¹⁵

But neither pomp nor imprisonment slowed the pace of crime or of court-ordered executions in the Commonwealth. In 1783 the first execution under Massachusetts authority took place on the Worcester Common, evoking the ancient ritual manifesting state power. Two young veterans—William Huggins, honorably discharged in the summer of 1782, and John Mansfield, an escapee from a British prison ship—met by chance in Stockbridge. Bored with farm work, Huggins and Mansfield set off for Salem to sign on a privateer. To finance their adventure the two men invaded a farmhouse in Pelham and the following night slipped into an inn, stealing a silver watch, coins, and a small amount of money. By the following day they were in Concord, ten miles to the east of the inn at Harvard, but the alarm had been raised. The Concord sheriff spotted the two drifters and soon discovered that Huggins and Mansfield had the stolen goods in their possession. They were charged with a capital felony—forcibly entering an inhabited house at night for the purpose of theft—found guilty, and sentenced to death. On June 18,

1783, Huggins and Mansfield walked from jail to the Worcester Common escorted by a troop of militiamen, the sheriff, and a clergyman. When they reached the gallows, the two condemned men may have said a prayer before they climbed up ladders, with nooses around their necks. At a signal from the sheriff, Huggins and Mansfield were "turned off" the ladders. Their bodies dangled for three-quarters of an hour before they were cut down.¹⁶

One year later Bostonians witnessed three executions: Cassumo Garcelli was hanged for murder, and Francis Coven and Derick Grout suffered the same fate for burglary. On November 6, 1783, Garcelli, a twenty-three-year-old Italian sailor on shore leave with several of his shipmates, swaggered into a North End pub. After a few rounds of drinks and some dancing, one of the Italian sailors began to flirt with a woman patron. She rejected the sailor's amorous advances, and when he persisted, she cried out for help. Some local men came to her aid. During the ensuing melee John Johnson was stabbed to death. The Italian sailors fled the pub, but the following day Garcelli was found and identified as the assailant. At trial, a jury found Garcelli guilty of murder, and he was sentenced to death.¹⁷

Although Garcelli was an Italian Catholic his published confession conformed to a Boston Protestant model. He praised his parents' morality and regretted that he had rebuffed their efforts "to check the natural viciousness of [his] disposition." Without parental guidance, Garcelli fell in with "lewd, ill-moral'd Fellows" with whom he led a dissolute sailor's life. Finally, he confessed to killing Johnson, as well as two other men in similar brawls in foreign ports. On January 15, 1784, Garcelli was hanged at a gallows "on Boston neck." The *Spy* reported that he "behaved in a manner suitable to his unhappy situation."¹⁸

Nine months after Garcelli's execution, Francis Coven and Derick Grout slowly walked to the gallows on Boston Common, each man convicted separately of capital burglary. Coven and Grout were two of forty men and women indicted for criminal acts in the Supreme Judicial Court's two Suffolk County trial sessions in 1784, a number nearly three times higher than the previous year. Coven was a twenty-two-year-old Frenchman, who came to Boston as a member of the French expeditionary forces in 1782. Shortly after his arrival he was convicted of robbing a Roxbury house and of assaulting a Boston man. Found guilty, the court fixed Coven's punishment at thirty lashes laid on his bare back and six months' imprisonment. Undeterred, Coven was back in court in August

1784 for theft and burglary. He pled not guilty to both charges, and he went to trial. Two separate Suffolk County juries found Coven guilty on both counts, and he was sentenced to death on the burglary conviction. At the same court session, Derick Grout, a native New Yorker and Revolutionary War veteran, was found guilty of several counts of burglary. Evidence was presented at trial showing that on March 24, Grout broke into the house of Gilbert Warner, carrying off a set of silver spoons, an overcoat, and nine pairs of stockings. On the next day he took a silver watch, a clock, and twenty pounds of salt pork from the home of Elizabeth Elliott. A few days later Grout broke into a Roxbury hat shop. Found guilty of the Elliott burglary, Grout confessed to his crime spree. According to the *Massachusetts Spy*, both men "behaved very penitent in their last moments."¹⁹

John Dixon was a first-time offender when he received a sentence of death on November 11, 1784. In the summer of that year he broke into his neighbor's shop and carried off dozens of items. Because the shop owner lived upstairs, Dixon was charged with nocturnal burglary on an inhabited dwelling, a capital offense. Seven days later he was executed in Taunton. "It is worthy of remark," the *Massachusetts Spy* rationalized in its story covering Dixon's hanging, "that the various culprits that have been executed, and are now under sentence of death within this commonwealth since the revolution, have been chiefly foreigners. Out of 16 that have suffered, but four of them were Americans, and but two belonged to this state."²⁰

The *Spy's* argument was almost immediately undercut by the hanging of two American-born thieves. Laborers William Cott, alias Scott, and Thomas Archibald broke into James Lovell's Boston home in late November 1784. An old friend of John and Abigail Adams and a staunch patriot, Lovell served as Continental tax commissioner for Massachusetts. Once inside Lovell's house, Scott and Archibald found a trunk-sized metal strongbox and carried it away to their hideout. When they broke it open they discovered \$25,000 in negotiable notes, gold and silver coins, and paper currency. For several months the two thieves spent only their ill-gotten cash and, therefore, went undetected. But when Scott tried to pass a negotiable note drawn on a Boston bank the two men were arrested, tried, and convicted. In a solemn voice, Chief Justice William Cushing sentenced Scott and Archibald to be hanged. While the two men waited in the Boston jail for their death sentence to be carried out, they apparently had a raucous good time. The *Massachusetts Spy*

worried that their behavior might be undermining public confidence in the death penalty. Following their execution, however, the paper reported, with a sigh of relief, that Scott and Archibald had initially "behaved in a manner unbecoming their unhappy condition," but that on the morning of their execution "they appeared penitent and suitably affected with their situations." In short, by turning solemn and repentant at the last moment the *Spy* believed the two men's execution had served its purpose of deterring potential criminals.²¹

If Scott and Archibald's happy-go-lucky attitude toward the death penalty caused some to worry about its efficacy, John Sheehan's naïve criminal act also stirred up some discussion about the severity of the court's action in sentencing the young Irishman to death. Sheehan followed his older brother from Ireland to Boston, arriving on November 11, 1786. Despite a building boom, Sheehan was unable to find work, and he enlisted in the American army for a four-month stint. By making good use of his military connections following his honorable discharge, he found work in Boston as a laborer. On a summer day off he took a walk down a country road outside Boston, where he met two men who offered to sell him a cache of silverware for a very modest price. Although he suspected it was stolen, Sheehan bought the silverware hoping to turn a quick profit by reselling it. He eventually offered his purchase to a Providence, Rhode Island, silversmith. The shopkeeper became suspicious, however, when he noticed the marks identifying the silverware maker had been damaged deliberately and sent his apprentice for the sheriff, who arrested Sheehan for burglary. Sheehan denied the charge, insisting that he bought the silverware from two strangers. But at trial, the prosecution showed that Sheehan was in Boston the day the silverware was stolen from one of the town's well-to-do residents. Sheehan was convicted and sentenced to death. Because the damning evidence against him was flimsy, an army officer under whom Sheehan had served made an attempt to win a pardon for the young Irishman. The effort failed, and Sheehan's "Last Words and Dying Speech," a broadside seeking "to satisfy the curious Publick," was widely distributed on November 22, 1787, when he was hanged on Boston Common. A separate publication hinted that Sheehan may well have been innocent of the burglary and that he should have been given the benefit of the doubt.²²

While Sheehan awaited his fate, a gang of highwaymen operating on the roads linking Boston to the nearby towns pounced on Nathaniel Cunningham as he walked from Boston to Cambridge on the evening

of November 6. Armed with pistols and knives, the four assailants threatened to murder Cunningham if he didn't give them his money and valuables. As the muggers fled on foot Cunningham's shouts for help roused the night watchman, and he gave chase. The watchman grabbed two suspects and before long they stood before the bar of justice charged with the capital crime of highway robbery. The trial occurred only a few days after delegates—including several members of the Supreme Judicial Court who heard the case—had ratified the United States Constitution. The defendants, Archibald and Joseph Taylor—the first from Philadelphia and the latter from Ireland—were found guilty. Under a tough new law the two men were sentenced to death and, on May 8, 1788, hanged near the spot where they assaulted and robbed Cunningham. Interestingly, there were neither printed last words from these unrepentant professionals nor a sermon justifying the state's action.²³

The silence that greeted the Taylors' execution may have been a reflection of some public doubt about the efficacy and severity of the law. Despite harsh punishment and a string of executions, both criminal cases and capital crimes soared far above pre-Commonwealth levels. During the Supreme Judicial Court's two Suffolk County sessions in 1789, for example, fifty-three criminal indictments were brought before the court, a number four times greater than in 1781. Likewise, during the Commonwealth's first decade twenty-five persons were executed, twenty for robbery and burglary, a number five times higher than the previous seven decades. Still, the Commonwealth seemed unable to turn back the crime wave.²⁴

In 1789 three more persons were executed for highway robbery, including Rachel Wall. Like the Taylors before them, William Smith and William Denoffee, alias "Donogan," received little public notice for their brazen armed assaults on Boston citizens. During a single summer evening Smith and Denoffee attacked and robbed three men as they walked Boston's streets, taking from their victims a jacket, a silk handkerchief, and silver shoe buckles, among other items. The two were quickly captured, convicted of highway robbery, and sentenced to death by the Supreme Judicial Court. Smith and Denoffee waited more than a month in jail before they joined on the gallows Rachel Wall, a twenty-nine-year-old woman also sentenced to death for highway robbery.²⁵

Wall's route to the gallows was circuitous but not unusual. Born in rural Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1760 to a hardworking framer and his pious wife, Wall was pulled to Boston by her husband, whom she married at a young age against her parents' wishes. The couple lived together

only a short time before he “went off.” Left without resources, Rachel lived productively and happily until her husband unexpectedly and briefly returned to her. According to Rachel, before he disappeared again he entwined her in the sticky web of crime. Beginning in 1785, she claimed a string of successful robberies, and but two unsuccessful criminal forays. Wall and another woman pled guilty in the summer of 1785 to stealing goods from attorney Perez Morton, Esq., from whose home the parade of judges and lawyers had begun earlier in the year. The court sentenced Wall to pay triple damages of eighteen pounds, to have fifteen lashes laid on her bare back, and to pay court costs. Because she was unable to make payment, the court stipulated that her labor might be purchased for three years. Three years later to the day, Wall was back before the SJC. Together with two accomplices, Wall was arrested for housebreaking and theft. She pled guilty and the court sentenced her to pay Lemuel Ludden twenty-four pounds for the goods stolen, to sit on the gallows for one hour with a noose around her neck, and to be publicly whipped. Again, because Wall was penniless, the court announced that someone might purchase her labor for three years in exchange for paying her fine.²⁶

Boston’s booming economy and acute labor shortage seems once again to have helped Wall. Someone paid Wall’s court-ordered fine and by spring 1789 she was in service to a Boston employer. About supper-time on March 27 seventeen-year-old Margaret Bender was walking along a busy Boston street toward a friend’s home. Apparently entering the street from an intersecting alley, a woman walked rapidly after Bender. From behind, the assailant tried to grab Bender’s bonnet from her head, but failing to do so, hit the young woman in the face and stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth. Bender cried out for help. Colonel Thomas Dawes and his neighbor Charles Berry rushed into the street to help. While Dawes helped Bender stem the blood flowing from her mouth, Berry chased after the assailant shouting, “Stop that woman!” When he caught up with Wall, whom he believed to be the assailant, Berry took hold of her. He brought Wall to Bender, who said, “She appeared to be the same person” who attacked her. Wall was arrested and hurried off to Boston jail.²⁷

By any measure, the crime that sent Wall to the gallows—the attempted robbery of a bonnet—was trivial. Unlike at her prior court appearances, Wall pled not guilty, a claim of innocence with some credibility given that she had pled guilty to her earlier non-capital of-

fenses. Attorney General Paine prosecuted the case vigorously. He put nine witnesses on the stand, all of whom testified to Bender's bloody mouth and to Wall's capture. Only Berry positively identified Wall as the robber-assailant, because he claimed he saw her running away from the scene of the crime. Wall's two distinguished court-appointed attorneys, James Hughes and Christopher Gore, argued that since the bonnet was not found in Wall's possession when she was apprehended the most the prosecution might show was attempted robbery, a non-capital offense. The jury was not swayed by this defense argument or by her gender and found Wall guilty of highway robbery. In one of his last official acts before taking a seat on the Supreme Court of the United States, Chief Justice Cushing sentenced Wall—the last woman executed in Massachusetts for any crime—to be hanged by the neck until dead.²⁸

On October 10, 1789, four days before President George Washington made a triumphant visit to Boston, William Smith, William Denoffee, and Rachel Wall were hanged on the Boston Common. The woodcut illustration appearing on the broadside reporting Wall's last words shows a portable gallows, a houselike structure on wheels with a cross beam on top, on which hangs three bodies. The trio was the last executed in Massachusetts for highway robbery. Six years later the legislature took the crime of highway robbery carried out by an unarmed person off the capital list. From 1805 to 1836 conviction for highway robbery was punishable by life imprisonment. In 1836 a revised law permitted the trial judge to impose whatever prison sentence he saw fit.²⁹

The gallows was rolled onto Boston Common three more times before the turn of the century in order to execute young men convicted of burglary. Nineteen-year-old John Bailey, an African American sailor born in New York City, and Edward V. Brown, a onetime baker, were hanged on October 14, 1790. Bailey was attracted by Boston's economic opportunities. He came ashore to stay in the 1780s, first taking a job with a coachman and then becoming an apprentice to a candle maker. While relaxing with friends one spring evening after work, Bailey accepted a dare to break into a house. He proudly showed his friends a handkerchief, a pair of shoe buckles, and a silver napkin ring he had stolen. Bailey's bravado collapsed, however, when he was arrested and charged with the capital offense of night burglary of an inhabited dwelling. Although it was the boy's first offense a jury found Bailey guilty, and the court sentenced him to death. Bailey was hanged alongside Brown, a burglar apprehended with a huge cache of stolen goods.³⁰

Irish-born John Stewart was the third convicted burglar hanged on Boston Common. Banished to America by his family, Stewart landed in Wilmington, Delaware, a sixteen-year-old boy without family or friends. Rootless and desperately poor, he bounced from menial job to job until he found work with a Boston carpenter in the 1790s. Like Bailey, Stewart fell in with a wild bunch of boys and turned to crime to pay for his drinking and gambling habits. A short jail term for theft did nothing to change Stewart. As soon as he was released, he and two pals broke into the North End home of Captain Enoch Rust. The trio terrorized Rust's family until one of the captain's sons wrestled Stewart to the floor and took his gun. Stewart's pals fled the house, and Stewart was dragged off to jail. He came to trial five days later for capital burglary, and a jury found him guilty. On April 7, 1797, less than a month after his crime, nineteen-year-old John Stewart was "turned off." The *Boston Gazette* seemed troubled by the execution, noting that he had "not been guilty of many crimes" before his foolish foray into Captain Rust's house.³¹

African American Stephen Smith was the last person hanged on Boston Common for burglary. For twenty-eight years he had struggled to be free. Born a slave in Virginia, he rebelled by stealing from his master and other white planters. When caught, he was shipped to the West Indies to be worked to death on a sugar plantation, but somehow he managed to escape and return to Virginia. He sought refuge in the woods near Norfolk, stealing food and clothing in order to survive. Caught again, Smith was sent to the West Indies, but once again escaped. This time, he made his way to Nova Scotia and then to Boston, a free man. By this time, however, his criminal ways were deeply engrained, and after just seven months in the "cradle of liberty" Smith stood before the bar of justice. Convicted of two counts of housebreaking and two counts of arson, Smith was sentenced to death.³²

At 1:45 P.M. on October 12, 1797, Smith walked from Boston jail to the Common, where a large crowd already had assembled to witness the execution. With staff in hand, the sheriff paraded in front of Smith, and two sheriff's deputies on horseback rode alongside him. The Reverend Peter Thatcher also accompanied Smith to the gallows, praying softly. At the bottom of the Common the procession stopped and the sheriff read the execution order. Rev. Thatcher briefly prayed aloud and then read a statement said to have been written by Smith. "After a lengthy pause," Smith spoke himself. He assured the crowd that he had received a fair trial, and he thanked the sheriff and jailer for their kindness. The

noose was put around Smith's neck and a white hood pulled over his head before he was led to the scaffold and "launched into ETERNITY." After about a half an hour his body was cut down and put into a coffin.³³

The United States government also used the Boston Common scaffold to execute persons convicted of federal crimes. In December 1793, for example, the American brig *Betsy*, en route from Spain to Boston, ran into stormy seas, and Captain Joseph Saunders decided to change course for a safe harbor in the West Indies. Some crew members objected and, in attempting to take over the ship, killed an American passenger. An armed standoff between the officers and the mutineers lasted until a passing American warship spotted the captain's distress signal, boarded the *Betsy*, and put the mutineers in irons. After a trial in federal district court in Boston, an international trio of mutineers and murderers was executed on July 30, 1794.³⁴

By the 1790s the pace of capital prosecutions and executions had slowed dramatically, and the people of Massachusetts recoiled from the excessive use of capital punishment. From 1780 to 1784 fifty-five people were prosecuted for committing capital crimes, whereas from 1790 to 1794 only eighteen persons stood before the Supreme Judicial Court accused of a capital crime. Likewise, twenty people were executed in the 1780s, but the number fell to ten in the 1790s and dropped even further during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Greater economic and political stability and the declining number of executions spawned opposition to capital punishment and spurred the ongoing transformation of criminal law beginning in the 1790s.³⁵

Even when crime was at its peak during the bloody decades from 1780 to 1800, doubts about the death penalty were plentiful. Without an explicit biblical provision for executing burglars, Massachusetts preachers struggled to find justification for capital punishment. In 1784 the Reverend Peres Forbes confronted convicted burglar John Dixon's angry neighbors. They "manifested their doubts and dissatisfaction concerning the lawfulness of the intended execution" and criticized the "judges and jury, the sheriff and state's-attorney, the prosecutor and the preacher." Surprisingly, Forbes told his listeners they couldn't expect a body of religious laws made for a vastly different people and time "to bind us, or any other nation on earth, at this day." In place of biblical law, Forbes sketched out a conservative economic argument to justify Dixon's execution: the Commonwealth's new prosperity demanded tougher sanctions against property crimes than earlier periods. The execution took place

without further incident, but the depth of the people's skepticism about capital punishment was clear.³⁶

Other critics of the death penalty branded it ineffective, inhuman, and anti-republican. "It must give every man of feeling [*sic*] the most sensible pain when he observes how insufficient our penal laws are to answer the end they were designed to," wrote one critic to the *Massachusetts Centinel*. Others contrasted the alleged barbarity of a monarchical society with the humanity of enlightened republicanism. The *Centinel's* editor noted that laws mandating the death penalty were "no more a check to simple robbery [than] they are [incentive] to getting money honestly." But the alternative of "taking a man's life for every trifling theft, as is done in England, is a disgrace to a civilized nation. Humanity recoils from the idea." Privately, Abigail Adams expressed the same opinion. En route by coach from Canterbury to London to join her husband, Abigail saw a captured highwayman. "We saw the poor wretch, ghastly, and horrible, brought along on foot." Learning that the young robber was certain "to swing," Abigail shuddered. "Though every robber may deserve death yet to exult over the wretched is what our country is not accustomed to. Long may it be free of such villainies and long may it preserve a commiseration for the wretched."³⁷

In the winter of 1793 two articles were published in Boston's *Independent Chronicle* that gave voice to the people's antipathy toward the Commonwealth's use of capital punishment. "Marcus"—perhaps a pseudonym for Attorney General James Sullivan—articulated a compelling argument against the death penalty. Although capital punishment had been on the books for a long time, Marcus began, "I very much doubt the right of any Civil Government to punish a citizen with death for any crime whatever." By definition, he argues, a republican government's ability to make laws must not exceed the explicit powers granted to it by the people, and no one may delegate to the government a power he does not have himself. Because a citizen does not have the right "to dispose of his own life," he may not give that power to the government. Therefore the Commonwealth has no constitutional right to put someone to death. For the same reason, he continues, Massachusetts cannot adhere to the biblical injunctions sanctioning capital punishment nor follow the example of the ancient Jewish state, which was a theocracy. Massachusetts was a republic created and controlled by the people.³⁸

Having denied the constitutional validity of capital punishment, Marcus next blasted the legal and social arguments made by proponents of

the death penalty. Proponents claimed that because a person had the right to take the life of someone attempting to murder him he might grant that right to the government. But, Marcus insisted, the right to defend oneself is “merely momentary,” and, therefore, is not “transferable” to a republican government. Brushing aside this theoretical argument, advocates for capital punishment insisted that without the death penalty “a long train of hideous consequences” would inevitably result. People’s lives and property would not be secure. “But allowing this objection all the force which it is wished to have,” countered Marcus, it is merely an argument for “conveniency, which could never give any kind of right.”³⁹

In fact, the claims that capital punishment deterred crime or was beneficial for the victim’s family and friends were also false, according to Marcus. First, no one who commits a crime intends to be caught. To the contrary, a “momentary” calculation leads the offender to believe he will get away with the crime. Therefore, it makes no difference what the punishment might be. Second, if the death penalty were a deterrent, crime rates would be lower in states where it is imposed than in states that do not use the death penalty. But convictions for theft are higher in New York than in Massachusetts, although theft is a capital offense in New York and punishable by imprisonment in Massachusetts. Third, in Great Britain, “from whom we learned the idea of Capital Punishments,” criminals risk the death penalty by picking the pockets of people gathered to witness the execution of a pickpocket. Fourth, putting a convicted felon to death cannot help the victim’s friends and family, “for no man can receive a positive compensation by the death of his fellow creature.” Rather, placing a murderer in an “iron cage” would be a far more effective deterrent than execution. Exposing the convict to public scrutiny would make people aware of the “monumental pain, shame and disgrace” an offender must suffer for a very long time. Finally, Marcus reminds his readers, no one who participates in the process of “launching a soul into the presence of its Maker and Judge” should believe “that what they are doing is RIGHT.”⁴⁰

No doubt swayed in part by the attorney general’s powerful argument, the Massachusetts legislature took steps to bring the law into closer conformity with republican ideals. The capital law against burglary “is so severe that many offenders escape punishment,” because juries will not convict, a senate committee noted. Governor Caleb Strong told the legislature in 1803 that he would pardon unarmed burglars sentenced to

death. The governor's motive was not strictly humanitarian. Rather, he feared that putting to death unarmed burglars "would only excite compassion for the delinquent" and undermine support for capital punishment. In short, the governor and others used compassion and judicial fairness to justify capital punishment. Prompted by that mix of motives, Massachusetts lawmakers took burglary off the capital list the year following the governor's speech and invested money and ideology in an alternative means of punishment, namely, Charlestown prison. At the same time the committee reduced the list of crimes punishable by death and eliminated the stocks, the pillory, whipping, and mutilation. The committee also suggested in its report to the legislature accompanying the new law code that if the state prison were successful, the capital list might be further reduced.⁴¹

The legislature also opened up the judicial system by enacting a law requiring the governor to appoint a reporter to record and publish the Supreme Judicial Court's decisions. Published court reports would serve many purposes. They would help to create a permanent system of American common law, satisfy the demand of a growing number of lawyers, and highlight publicly that Massachusetts was a government of laws. Dudley Tyng, reporter for volumes two through seventeen of court *Reports*, added that publishing the decisions of the court would buttress republicanism by allowing the people of Massachusetts to pay close attention to the "import and extent" of their constitutional rights.⁴²

In fact, the reported decisions of the court manifested the importance of criminal procedure, emphasizing the position that a criminal defendant should not be found guilty unless he had been given the same procedural opportunities to prove his innocence as the state had to prove his guilt. There was widespread agreement that procedural rules that had been "established in arbitrary times" were "not suited to the spirit of free institutions." Therefore, in keeping with Article 12 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights the SJC crafted new rules regulating confessions, counsel, and capital punishment, among other aspects of criminal procedure. In this way the protection of liberty was linked to procedural fairness.⁴³

In 1804, for example, the court used a potentially explosive capital case involving rape and murder to articulate a new rule that prohibited the admissibility of a confession obtained by "promises, persuasions, or hopes of pardon." John Battis, a nineteen-year-old African American born to an interracial Boston couple, was charged with the rape and

murder of a white teenage girl. Four months after his capture, Battis stood before the court and pled guilty to “that most atrocious crime.” But the court insisted he take a “reasonable time to consider” his plea, reminding him that “he was under no legal or moral obligation to plead guilty, that he had a right to deny the several charges and put the government to the proof of them.” Battis reiterated his guilt, but, fearful that someone had encouraged Battis to confess, the court questioned everyone who had visited him while he awaited trial. Satisfied by its full inquiry, the court allowed Battis to enter a plea of guilty. Attorney General James Sullivan moved for a sentence of death, which Chief Justice Francis Dana “delivered in a solemn, affecting and impressive address to the prisoner.” Battis was hanged on November 8, 1804.⁴⁴

Two other important rules of criminal procedure closely followed *Battis*. Because the “life of a fellow human being” was at stake, the SJC officially acknowledged that it had a responsibility to appoint counsel in a capital case and to allow the trial court’s procedural errors to be appealed. Harvard law professor Nathan Dane proudly documented the Massachusetts court’s liberalization of criminal procedure in his *General Abridgement and Digest of American Laws*. Dane compared the “severity, or rather cruelty of the English law” that denied the accused the right to counsel to the “value and excellency” of Massachusetts practice. William Hardy’s court-appointed counsel, for example, caused the SJC to reverse a death sentence for the first time in its history. The court ordered a new trial for convicted child murderer Hardy because a single justice had presided over the indictment and not three justices, as required. “If ever quibbling is at any time justifiable,” Chief Justice Theophilus Parsons wrote, “certainly a man may quibble for his life.” Hardy won acquittal at his new trial.⁴⁵

In the immediate postwar decades footloose young men and women came to Boston in search of prosperity. A few were willing to risk their lives to achieve it by criminal means. The crime rate soared, and anxious citizens demanded retribution. There followed an orgy of state-sanctioned executions which, for the first time in Massachusetts history, spurred a public dialogue about the legality and utility of capital punishment. Proponents and opponents alike viewed the death penalty through the political lens of republicanism.

Those supporting state executions believed that the new Commonwealth could not endure without the deterrent to crime supposedly provided by capital punishment, enacted by the consent of the people.

Opponents insisted that capital punishment and a republican form of government were incompatible and that the threat of death was not a deterrent to crime. The legislature and the courts embraced a moderate republican position that forged an inseparable link between liberty and the law. The legislature pared down the list of capital crimes, and the court moved aggressively after 1800 to extend procedural protection to capital defendants.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Supreme Judicial Court's commitment to linking criminal due process and republicanism was picked up by felons who came before the court. Frederick Ayers, "a transcient person, late a resident of Boston," begged the court for a second chance by striking a republican chord. Convicted of stealing a 100-pound tub of sugar, five pounds of butter, seven pounds of hog fat, and one silk handkerchief from a Boston merchant, Ayers was sentenced to twenty lashes and court costs. Because he was unable to pay the costs he was to be sold into service until he had worked off the amount owed. But "no person agreed to bye him," and he sat idle in the Boston jail. In a petition to the court asking for an early release, Ayer added a new wrinkle to the prisoner's usual tale of woe. He promised "to watch over his future conduct with that care and Circumspection as becomes a good Cetezeson." The court promptly granted his petition.⁴⁶

The court did more to earn its reputation as a defender of liberty than occasionally temper justice with mercy. When Chief Justice Theophilus Parsons died in 1813, it was said that one way he and the court had advanced individual rights "in the administration of the criminal rights" was "to require of the public prosecutors the most scrupulous exactness, believing it to be the right, even of the guilty, to be tried according to known and practiced rules; and that it were a less evil for a criminal to escape, than that the barriers established for the security of innocence should be overthrown." Nearly two centuries later, the Supreme Judicial Court's historic commitment to due process led the court to abolish capital punishment in Massachusetts. Citing Articles 12 and 26 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, the court found capital punishment antithetical to the "freedom that underlies the democratic mind."⁴⁷

Notes

1. The quotation in the title is from "Observations on Capital Punishments," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), February 7, 1793. The literature on re-

publicanism is vast and contentious, but students must begin with Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 39 (1982): 334–56, and Marc W. Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty: State Constitution Making in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). See also, Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

2. John Adams seems to have had doubts about capital punishment as early as 1768. He successfully defended Samuel Quinn, who was charged with capital rape. After the trial Quinn heaped praise on Adams, which Adams recorded with great pleasure and pride in his diary, L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1:353. The best guide to the Massachusetts Constitution is Ronald M. Peters, *The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780: A Social Compact* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978).

3. Samuel Cooper, “A Sermon on the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution” (Boston, 1780), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 645; *Boston Town Records, 1784–1796*, vol. 31 of *Reports of the Record Commissioners* (Boston, 1903), 128. Neale to RTP, June 6, 1794, Paine Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; *Commonwealth v. Foster*, 1 Mass. 488 (1805).

4. William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 4:176. Hancock quoted in Edwin Powers, *Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 193.

5. George R. Minot, *The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1788), 11–12. “An Address from the General Court to the People of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” (Boston, 1786), 34. Sargeant, “Court Minutes” (Essex Institute, n.d.). Sargeant served on the court from 1775 to 1791.

6. William Nelson, *The Americanization of the Common Law: The Impact of Legal Change on Massachusetts Society, 1760–1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Adam J. Hirsch, “From Pillory to Penitentiary: The Rise of Criminal Incarceration in Early Massachusetts,” *Michigan Law Review* 80 (1982): 1179; Masur, *Rites of Execution*.

7. Peters, *The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780*, 14, 18–22. Samuel Adams is quoted in Cornelius Dalton et al., *Leading the Way: A History of the Massachusetts General Court* (Boston, 1984), 77.

8. The best treatment of Shays’ Rebellion is David P. Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of

Massachusetts Press, 1980). For Bostonians' reactions, Myron F. Wehtje, "Boston's Response to Disorder in the Commonwealth, 1783-1787," in *Shays' Rebellion: Selected Essays*, ed. Martine Kaufman (Westfield, Mass.: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, 1987), 55-64.

9. *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), March 29, 1787; James R. Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts*, 2 vols. (Northampton, Mass., 1898-1902), 2:515-16.

10. Thomas G. Amory, *Life of James Sullivan*, 2 vols. (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1859), 1:205-7; *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston), May 2, 1787; William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams*, 4 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1866), 3:246.

11. Thomas H. O'Connor and Alan Rogers, *This Momentous Affair: Massachusetts and the Ratification of the Constitution of the United States* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1987).

12. Jacqueline B. Carr, "A Change 'as Remarkable as the Revolution Itself': Boston's Demographics, 1780-1800," *New England Quarterly* 73 (December 2000): 583, 585-91. My data about occupations was achieved by matching the names of incarcerated prisoners (Castle Island Commitment Register, H.S.9.03/314x, Massachusetts Archives) with their indictments, Suffolk Files, Judicial Archives, Massachusetts Archives (hereafter SF). Henry Tufts, *The Autobiography of a Criminal* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Loompanics, 1993), 230.

13. This data is from Docket Books of the Supreme Judicial Court, Massachusetts Archives (hereafter SJC Docket Books).

14. *Exchange Advertiser* (Boston), February 17, 1785.

15. Hirsch, "Pillory to Penitentiary," 1179, 1199. Castle Island Commitment Register, Massachusetts State Archives.

16. SF 153329; *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester), June 16, 1783; and *The Last Words of William Huggins and John Mansfield* (Worcester, 1783).

17. Papers of Increase Sumner, Criminal Cases, vol. 1, 15 (Massachusetts Historical Society); *Boston Gazette*, November 10, 1783, and January 19, 1784.

18. *The Last Words and Dying Confession of Cassumo Garcelli* (Boston, 1783) and *Massachusetts Spy*, January 22, 1784.

19. SF 103472 and 103477; *The Last Words and Dying Speech of Derick Grout and Francis Coven* (Boston, 1784); *Massachusetts Spy*, November 11, 1784.

20. SF 1461332; *Massachusetts Spy*, November 24, 1784.

21. *Independent Chronicle*, November 26, 1784, and March 10, 1785; *Boston Gazette*, May 9, 1785.

22. *Last Words and Dying Confession of John Sheehan* (Boston, 1787); *Massachusetts Centinel*, November 24, 1787.

23. Papers of Increase Sumner, Criminal Cases, vol. 3, 287. Justices Francis Dana and William Cushing served as delegates to the Massachusetts ratifying convention from January 8 to February 6, 1788. *Acts and Resolves*, 1784, chap. 52 (Boston, 1785). Punishment for highway robbery escalated. A 1711 law called for

a six-month prison sentence for the first offense and death if a person was convicted a second time of the same crime, *Province Laws*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1869), 674. A 1761 law made death the penalty for a single conviction of highway robbery, *Province Laws*, vol. 4 (Boston, 1881), 546. Although this law was on the books, no one was executed for the offense until 1784. *Independent Chronicle*, November 8, 1787, and *Massachusetts Centinel*, May 10, 1788.

24. This data is derived from SJC Docket Books.

25. SF 105405 and 105406.

26. *Last Words and Dying Confession of Rachel Wall* (Boston, 1789). Wall made no mention of her two earlier convictions but claimed two other daring robberies.

27. Robert Treat Paine, Trial Notes, Massachusetts Historical Society.

28. Ibid. In the postwar period, two women were brought to trial charged with the capital crime of petty treason for murdering their husbands. Rebecca Kerilly, Boston, was acquitted in 1784, and Priscilla Woodworth, Hampshire County, was acquitted in 1782.

29. *Dying Confession of Rachel Wall. Acts and Resolves*, 1804, chap. 143, sec. 7 (Boston, 1785). *Revised Statutes of Massachusetts*, chap. 125, sec. 15 (Boston, 1837). For a discussion of the literature of thievery, see Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, chap. 6.

30. SF 105699, 105680, and 105739.

31. *The Confession, Last Words, and Dying Speech of John Stewart* (Boston, 1797); *Columbian Sentinel* (Boston), April 8, 1797. *Boston Gazette*, April 10, 1797.

32. *Columbian Sentinel*, September 6, 1797, and October 14, 1797. *Life, Last Words, and Dying Speech of Stephen Smith* (Boston, 1797).

33. *Dying Speech of Stephen Smith*.

34. *Independent Chronicle*, April 7, 1794, and *Columbian Sentinel*, August 8, 1794.

35. This data is derived from SJC Records and Docket Books.

36. Peter Forbes, *A Sermon, The Substance of Which Was Delivered at Taunton, November 11, 1784*, appendix, 7–8, 11–12 (Providence, 1784).

37. *Massachusetts Centinel*, October 16, 1784. Abigail Adams to John Adams, July 21, 1784, as quoted in David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 297. Pennsylvania's Benjamin Rush made the corruption of monarchy the centerpiece of his argument against capital punishment. See Masur, *Rites of Execution*, 64–65.

38. *Independent Chronicle*, February 7, 14, 1793.

39. *Independent Chronicle*, February 14, 1793.

40. Ibid. "Marcus" borrowed from Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, published in Italian in 1764 and subsequently translated into English. John Adams quoted from Beccaria in his closing argument in *Rex v. Weems et al.*, in Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 289. Robert Rantoul's 1836 argument for abolishing capital punishment in Massachusetts also argued that an individual could not give to the government the right to take his life, Alan Rogers, "Under Sentence of Death": The

Movement to Abolish Capital Punishment in Massachusetts, 1835-1849," *New England Quarterly* 66 (1993): 27.

41. This data is compiled from the SJC Records and Docket Books. Massachusetts Archives Collection (SCI/45x), 47:498-99; Governor Strong's Address to the Legislature, *Acts and Resolves*, 1803 (Boston, 1804). N. Dane and S. Sewall, Report of the Committee, February 16, 1806, Senate Document 3232 (Massachusetts State Archives).

42. William Cranch, reporter for the United States Supreme Court, believed that publishing the Court's decisions would stimulate American patriotism by ending "that servile recourse to the decisions of foreign judicatures, which since our revolution, we have been too much accustomed," as quoted in Charles Warren, *The Supreme Court in United States History*, 3 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1922), 1:289n. Tyng's comments, 2 Mass. 3 (1805). Ephraim Williams was the first person appointed SJC reporter, but he was overwhelmed and resigned before he had served a year, 1 Mass. iii-vi (1804).

43. *Acts and Resolves*, 1805 (Boston, 1806), *Commonwealth v. Green*, 17 Mass. 515, 517 (1822).

44. *Commonwealth v. Battis*, 1 Mass. 94, 95 (1805), and *The Confession of John Battis* (Dedham, Mass., 1804).

45. Massachusetts appointed counsel for capital defendants from an early date, but Hardy spelled out the rule. See Alan Rogers, "'A Sacred Duty': Court Appointed Counsel in Massachusetts Capital Cases," *American Journal of Legal History* 61 (1997): 440; *Commonwealth v. Hardy*, 2 Mass. 302, 308 (1807). Nathan Dane, *General Abridgement and Digest of American Laws*, 8 vols. (Boston, 1823-1824), 6:335, 210-18.

46. SF 106179. Ayers stood before the court on another theft charge two years later. He was sentenced to three years' hard labor at Castle Island prison.

47. Isaac Parker, "A Sketch of the Character of the Late Chief Justice Parsons," 10 Mass. 521, 529 (1813). *District Attorney v. Watson*, 381 Mass. 648, 683 (1980).

Power and Social Responsibility
Entrepreneurs and the Black Community in Antebellum Boston



LOIS E. HORTON AND JAMES OLIVER HORTON

*Business is business the Little Man said,
 A battle where anything goes.
 Where the only gospel is "get ahead,"
 and never spare friends or foes.*

—BERTON BRALEY, "BUSINESS IS BUSINESS"

A TRADITIONAL HISTORY OF AMERICAN BUSINESS is most likely to focus on issues leading directly to the bottom line. The organizational strategy for market expansion, for dealing with distribution, for controlling raw materials and stabilizing or reducing labor costs.

Business was business for the black entrepreneurs of Boston no less than for their white counterparts. They too worried about the bottom line, but the history of Boston's black business community is not a traditional history. Their responsibilities went beyond the bottom line to the line of community concerns. Black entrepreneurs were expected to provide leadership to the community and apprenticeships for the young, to serve as role models for those struggling against oppression and limited opportunities, and to be an argument against theories of racial inferiority. In short, their business ventures were expected not only to benefit them individually, but to benefit the black community as a whole.

In some ways this was not unique to black business. All nineteenth-century businesses had to be mindful of community relations and of the good name on which their credit was based, but because racial restriction targeted all black people, those in business were bound to the community in extraordinary ways. African Americans were expected to contribute what they could to the community's mutual effort to advance black

interests. This has been a continuing expectation. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, anthropologist Carol Stack described a similar phenomenon among poor black women in the Flats, the fictitious name she gave to the section of a Midwestern community that she studied. Since she lived among these women, she was called on to fulfill responsibilities expected of community members. One of these was to provide transportation when it was needed, because she was the only one of the group with a functioning automobile. Like Stack, Boston's black entrepreneurs were often called on to provide services, since they generally had little cash resources.¹

Among African Americans in antebellum Boston, as elsewhere, every man, woman, and child was expected to act not only for himself or herself but also for the community and the race. From the pulpits, the newspapers, and any public podium, the word was broadcast that loyalty to the race was highly valued and that the disloyal risked strong community sanctions. African Americans depended on their professionals and business people to bring respectability to the race. From the platform of Boston's Faneuil Hall, doctor, dentist, lawyer, teacher, and black activist John Rock, then a young man of thirty-five years, addressed a large crowd with this well-worn message, repeated over generations.

The colored man who by dint of perseverance and industry, educates and elevates himself, prepares the way for others, gives character to the race and hastens the day of general emancipation.²

African American success was a collective victory, not merely an individual achievement. Those who established an enterprise, secured influence, and acquired wealth were valued community resources. It was not wealth itself that Rock encouraged, but the power that accrued to wealth—power that could be used for the benefit of the race. “We do not expect to occupy a much better position [as a race] than we now do,” he concluded, “until we shall have our educated and wealthy men, who can wield a power that cannot be misunderstood.”³

Rock's statements reflected community expectations that those with influence would stand in defense of the race. The need for such defense was growing during the 1850s, when Rock made this statement. These were especially trying times for black people all over the country. Federal law had strengthened the ability of slavery to reach out from the South, recapture fugitives, and even kidnap those who had never been enslaved.

The highest court in the nation judged African Americans a stateless people with “no rights the white man was bound to respect.”⁴ Many white reformers suggested that blacks leave America, and some blacks did leave for Liberia, Haiti, Canada, or elsewhere. Yet most blacks refused to concede to the power of slavery, vowing not to be slaves, not to leave, and trying not to despair. Instead they resisted, asserting their rights as Americans. Black entrepreneurs especially supported this resistance.

The calls at mid-century for black business achievement for the good of the race were not new. Blacks had long equated individual black success with racial pride. A generation earlier Maria W. Stewart had urged Boston’s black men to take up trades, open businesses, and establish themselves as prosperous community members. She called on them to demonstrate their manhood and the manhood of the race, by which she meant pride, autonomy, and citizenship.⁵ Throughout the antebellum years many of the hopes of black America rested on the actions of black entrepreneurs. Their numbers were small and their opportunities severely limited, but black businessmen and businesswomen were vitally important to the sustenance and progress of the antebellum free black community in the North. Although slavery had been abolished in Massachusetts a few years after the Revolution, many of the African Americans who lived in the Commonwealth were not far removed from that degraded status. Unlike the gradual emancipation in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, freedom in the Bay State came quickly as a result of a 1783 state supreme court ruling. Yet slavery remained a familiar institution among Massachusetts blacks throughout the antebellum period in the personal memories of those who had known bondage in the state during the eighteenth century, in stories told to later generations, and in the more recent experiences of those who continued to emigrate or escape from slavery in the Southern states.⁶

Most of these former slaves and their descendants had neither the time nor the opportunity to accumulate the capital necessary for business enterprises. Prejudice and discrimination further hampered black initiatives, making those who did manage to succeed in business all the more remarkable. From two-thirds to three-quarters of those African Americans who were employed in antebellum cities worked at low-level jobs requiring little skill or education. Typically they were day laborers, seamen, or domestic servants whose work was often insecure or sporadic.⁷ Everyone, no matter what occupational rank, was expected to play a role

in racial progress. Robert Roberts, a domestic servant, provided written instructions for other domestics so that they might conduct themselves with dignity, performing their tasks with pride and reflecting positively on the race, but there was little doubt that establishing a business was the preferred role for an enterprising African American.⁸

Among skilled workers and entrepreneurs, some had occupations like carpentry, shoemaking, or blacksmithing, which could have been learned in slavery or in freedom. Ironically, free black people sometimes had greater opportunities to use their skills and form businesses in Southern cities, under the paternalistic support of influential whites, than in Northern cities. Boston had few skilled workers able to establish businesses the equivalent of Ralph Burnet's in Charleston. Although not wealthy, this master blacksmith made a comfortable living providing goods and services for the surrounding plantations. Typically, black craftsmen in the South set up "primitive shanties" on the outskirts of town at a convenient crossroads near a country store. In the industrial census of Charleston of 1848 almost half of the city's eighty-nine blacksmiths were African American. The vast majority were slaves, reflecting the fact that in the antebellum South manual labor of any kind was disparaged as fit only for blacks and lowly whites.⁹ This often gave African American craftsmen a clear opportunity for enterprise. "The Negro blacksmith," W. E. B. Du Bois later wrote, "held almost absolute sway in this line, which included the many branches of forgery and other trades which are now classified under different heads from that of the regular blacksmith."¹⁰

In Boston there were few such opportunities. In the city directories and the census records of the antebellum period, listings of African American blacksmiths, carpenters, or brick masons are extremely rare. Those Boston blacks who established businesses were far more likely to open service-oriented operations. Many of these entrepreneurs, like hairdressers and some barbers and musicians, were likely to serve a mainly white clientele. However, a substantial number of black businesses were sustained by black sponsorship or patronage, and if they were not always the most financially stable, from the standpoint of black community needs, they were often the most significant. The most common black business enterprises were clothing dealerships, selling new and used clothing to a largely seafaring clientele; boardinghouse keeping, many also serving seamen; and barber and hairdressing shops.

BLACK WORKERS IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS LISTED IN THE
BOSTON CITY DIRECTORIES

	1841	1845	1848-9
barbers and hairdressers	37	37	50
clothing dealers	25	20	23
boardinghouse keepers	5	5	10
laborers	41	47	82
seamen	33	55	31

Although only a small number of black business operators were listed, they were almost surely over-represented in the historical record of African Americans because they were more likely to be residentially stable property owners than blacks who were unemployed, partially or irregularly employed, or working in unskilled or service jobs. City directories were especially skewed since they were primarily business directories and so were most likely to list middle-class workers and entrepreneurs. A somewhat more reliable listing of occupations, though still with a middle-class bias, may be found in the federal census taken every ten years. In both 1850 and 1860 the United States census for Boston the occupational categories of laborer and seaman comprised the vast majority of black male workers, with domestics accounting for the largest number of black female employees.

SELECTED OCCUPATION OF BLACK WORKERS

	1850	1860
barber and hairdresser	48	97
clothing dealers	9	21
boardinghouse keepers	5	5
laborers	117	106
seamen	141	132
domestics	56	205

Of the 56 domestic servants listed in the census in 1850, 48 were women; of the 205 domestic servants listed in 1860, 179 were women.

Obviously it was not easy for a black person to enter the business world even at the lowest levels. Yet, against all odds, a few exceptional black businessmen were highly successful during this period. In Boston, men like clothing dealer John P. Coburn, barber Peter Howard, and caterer Joshua B. Smith were among the most prominent and successful black businessmen. James W. Stewart, who had served in the United States Navy during the War of 1812, established a business as shipping

agent and engaged in fitting out whaling and fishing vessels sailing out of Boston. His shop on Broad Street was the only one of its kind run by a black man.¹¹ Sailors could go to David Walker's clothing shop, located first on Dock Square and then at 24 Brattle Street, to supply their needs for clothing and other gear. Walker was a free black migrant from North Carolina who moved to Boston in 1824. His business was probably what was often referred to as a "slop shop," where bartenders sold sailors' clothing and equipment their customers had bartered for drinks. Such shops recycled these goods, making a profit by reconditioning and reselling them to other sailors about to leave port. Although these were small businesses, they were significant, for they allowed a measure of economic and social independence for black proprietors and their families.¹²

Boston's black business community was notable, but its leaders did not compare to the giants in other northern cities who were nationally known and internationally influential. Among the wealthiest and best known in the early nineteenth century were James Forten, the Philadelphia sailmaker, Thomas Downing, the New York restaurateur, and Paul Cuffe, the New Bedford ship owner and sea captain. Yet Boston's black business community was connected to these and other well-known and well-positioned business leaders through both commercial channels and networks of political and social activism. Paul Cuffe's shipping enterprise imported goods for smaller entrepreneurs to buy and sell, including trade items from the West Indies with special appeal to African American tastes. When he decided to organize a trading operation with the African colony of Sierra Leone, Cuffe turned to members of the African Society of Boston and African institutions in other east coast cities for aid. Society members, many of them businessmen, endorsed Cuffe's efforts and recruited and screened settlers for the colony.¹³

Although black Bostonians respected successful entrepreneurs for their business accomplishments, they valued them even more for their contributions to the well-being and progress of the community. People with standing in the community found concrete ways to express their sense of community responsibility, sometimes by engaging in philanthropy and making financial contributions. The will of Thomas Cole, an antislavery activist and businessman in the 1830s and 1840s in Boston, illustrates the philanthropy and values of a man of relatively modest means. Cole was a hairdresser with a shop first on Congress Street, then on Atkinson, and a home on Beacon Hill on Southac Court, off Southac Street (later Phillips Street). He was a charter member of the local black

antislavery organization called the Massachusetts General Colored Association, was active in church and fraternal organizations, and upon his death in 1847 had an estate that totaled just under \$3,000. After providing for the settlement of his debts and his funeral expenses, Cole left separate bequests to his minister and his wife, and to two friends, one being the woman who cared for him before he died. He also left money to his nephew, to fellow hairdressers and friends John T. Hilton and Alfred G. Howard, and to Hilton's young son Thomas. Cole carefully distributed the remainder of his estate in accordance with his sense of community responsibility. He left \$400 to the Odd Fellows lodge with specific instructions that it be used for the funeral expenses of members and to aid their widows and orphans. He charged the deacons of the African Baptist Church, also called the First Independent Baptist Church, on Belknap (later Joy) Street to use his bequest of \$300 for "the relief of the sick, poor, and destitute members." Any property remaining was to be distributed to charities chosen by his friends and executors, Hilton and Howard. Two other provisions of his will provide an interesting glimpse into Cole's commitment to his community. He left his books to the Adelphic Union Library Association, a literary, discussion, and self-improvement group organized by black men a few years before. Should his nephew not reach the age of majority, his \$300 bequest and its proceeds were to be used to build a meeting hall for Boston's blacks.¹⁴

Black entrepreneurs were prominent supporters of local charitable organizations during their lifetimes as well. Their membership and contributions helped sustain benevolent and mutual aid societies, religious and fraternal organizations, and literary societies, but because they were often economically precarious, their subsidy was most likely to take the form of service. They provided financial support to significant community causes like antislavery and education, but they also provided their time and their places of business to meet community needs. Successful members of the community were especially likely to be involved in activities related to education and to the abolition of slavery. The career of William P. Powell demonstrates the range of their endeavors. Powell was born free in New York State in 1807. His mother was free, but his father, Edward Powell, was a slave who received his freedom under general emancipation in 1827. Powell served as a sailor, married a woman from Plymouth, and opened a boardinghouse for sailors in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Powell was one of a small group of black men who

spoke to the Massachusetts legislature in 1837, protesting racial discrimination. Concerned about the limitations of segregated education for black children, he worked for the integration of the public schools. To promote abolition and the education of young people, he chaired the Young Men's Wilberforce Debating Society in New Bedford.¹⁵

Boston's black entrepreneurs were disproportionately represented among those who led protest organizations and those who represented the community at local, regional, and national protest meetings. Even a cursory look at the records of the state meetings of Massachusetts blacks illustrates how often entrepreneurs represented Boston. Among the representatives at the statewide meetings in 1854 held in Boston, clothing dealer Lewis Hayden sat on the committee appointed to investigate the possibility of founding a manual labor school for the training and education of black youth. Blacksmith Joel W. Lewis and clothing dealer Jonas Clark served on the convention's executive committee. Clothier E. F. B. Mundrucu was a vice president of the state convention in 1858, and barber John J. Smith and caterer Joshua B. Smith served on that convention's business committee. At the national conventions Boston's black entrepreneurs were similarly active. Robert Roberts, a printer, and James G. Barbadoes, a hairdresser, represented Boston at the 1831 convention in Philadelphia, and Barbadoes was appointed as vice president. Barbadoes served at several conventions throughout the decade, joined at various points by hairdresser John Hilton and tailor Henry Weeden.

The list of founders and early officers of the black community's anti-slavery Massachusetts General Colored Association shows the importance of independent entrepreneurs to community organization. The most famous of the founders was David Walker. Walker was also the Boston agent for New York's *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American newspaper in the country (founded in 1827), and he authored a fiery antislavery tract, his *Appeal*, in 1829. Walker's exhortation to the slaves to recover their manhood and rise up against their masters infuriated Southern slaveholders; a price was put on his head, and suspicions were aroused when he was found dead on Bridge Street in Boston in 1830. Another founder of the association was barber Walker Lewis, a member of an established Boston family. His father, Thomas, was an original officer of the African Society—a mutual aid organization—and a founding member of the African Baptist Church, and was active in the African Masonic Lodge and in the early campaign for a black school. Walker Lewis moved to Lowell and opened a barbershop there in 1830, but

he and his family remained active in Boston's antislavery activities for generations.¹⁶

In 1833 the Massachusetts General Colored Association became an auxiliary of the newly created and racially integrated New England Anti-Slavery Society. At that time the officers were Thomas Dalton, president, William G. Nell, vice president, and James G. Barbadoes, secretary. Formerly a bootblack, Dalton operated a clothing store on Brattle Street and was so successful that at his death he left an estate of \$50,000. From the mid-1820s and throughout the 1830s, hairdresser, and later clothing dealer, Barbadoes was a stalwart of the abolition movement in Boston. He represented the community in the meetings of the black national conventions in 1833 and 1834 and served on the board of managers of the American Anti-Slavery Society from 1833 to 1836. Combining entrepreneurial interests and his commitment to racial progress, Barbadoes moved his family to Jamaica in 1840 with the intention of starting a silkworm industry there. He died of malaria the following year.¹⁷

The delegate to the New England Anti-Slavery Society appointed by the Massachusetts General Colored Association was businessman Joshua Easton, son of prominent turn-of-the-century manufacturer James Easton. James Easton was a blacksmith who served under George Washington during the Revolutionary War, helping to build Boston's fortifications on Dorchester Heights. Easton educated himself, and he and some other black men combined their resources and opened a forge and nail factory in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. He operated the factory for twenty years, making nails, edge tools, and anchors, and doing iron work for the construction of the Tremont Theater in Boston and for the Boston Marine Railway. For the advice he gave black entrepreneurs in Boston, Easton became known as the "Black Lawyer." Easton involved his sons Caleb, Joshua, Sylvanus, and Hosea in the business, and the factory became a family enterprise. Joshua Easton and Hosea Easton, who eventually became a minister, were charter members of the Massachusetts General Colored Association.¹⁸

Black businessmen also provided funds and facilities to support the antislavery and civil rights work of white abolitionists. When William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp started publishing *The Liberator* in Boston in 1831, they did so with borrowed type, a sparsely furnished rented office, and a small amount of credit. The contributions of a few friends and the moral and financial support of Philadelphia's James Forten made publication of the radical abolitionist paper possible. It was

Forten who forwarded the fifty-four dollars in advance proceeds from the paper's first twenty-seven subscribers, all of them black. Garrison and his paper, attacked and denounced from both the South and the North, were sustained by the support of the black community. Boston's black community was especially important, providing Garrison with apprentices Thomas Paul Jr. and William C. Nell, agents for his paper and other publications, subscribers, and direct financial support.¹⁹

Not only did the community's businessmen financially support and work through community organizations, but many also involved their own businesses in the causes of education, abolition, and aid to fugitive slaves. Captain Paul Cuffe, one of the most successful businessmen in New England, the son of an African-born slave and an Indian mother, operated a school at his home in Westport, where he taught navigation to local youths. He was committed to the freedom of his people, and in 1810 he sailed for Africa and the British colony of Sierra Leone. Cuffe hoped to gain permission from the abolitionists and merchants in England who controlled the colony to establish a trade between Sierra Leone and the United States that would show such a venture could be profitable even without trading in slaves. He also became convinced that the colony was a suitable and desirable place for colonization by American free blacks. Cuffe's plans were interrupted by the War of 1812, but late in 1815 he embarked for Africa carrying thirty-four settlers, including five families from Boston, many financed with his own money.²⁰

Black businesses manifested the entrepreneurs' sense of community responsibility in many different ways. The Eastons operated a school for the young people associated with their factory in Bridgewater, bringing the benefits of education to children sent to work at an early age and, undoubtedly, attempting to counter the education offered by a society that, Hosea Easton contended, taught "that a Negro is part monkey." The factory and the school stressed strict rules of morality and economic probity, and the factory operated on temperance principles, refusing to make the customary provisions of alcoholic beverages to workers.²¹ Boardinghouse keepers were frequently involved in service to community members, especially because many boardinghouses rented lodging to sailors who faced special dangers each time their ships put into ports in slave states. Often free black sailors were put in jail while they were in port, with jail costs charged to the ship and sometimes passed on to the sailor. One person to whom sailors in trouble could turn was the operator of the boardinghouse where they generally stayed in their home

port. When a sailor named John Tidd was jailed in New Orleans in 1834, his papers attesting to his free status and his clothing were confiscated. In this condition he was in danger of being sold into slavery, and so he wrote to boardinghouse keeper Arthur Jones to ask for aid. Jones organized residents of the boardinghouse and together with other businessmen convinced the governor to aid Tidd and support a campaign to protest such imprisonment.²²

Fugitive slaves who came to Boston either intending to settle there or on their way to Canada depended on aid from many people in the antebellum community, but they were especially indebted to direct aid from black businessmen. Lawyer Robert Morris defended captured fugitives, doctor John Rock cared for them when they were sick or injured, and clothing dealers like Lewis Hayden, John R. Manley, Jonas W. Clark, and James Scott replaced fugitives' slave garb with clothing suitable for freedom. Black barbershops were particularly important in the community's network of informal organizations aiding fugitive slaves. Barbers played many roles in the community, and their shops were places where people gathered to discuss political issues, find out about available jobs, buy concert tickets, and even rehearse their parts for plays and musical performances. Barbershops like Thomas Cole's on Atkinson Street and Peter Howard's on Cambridge Street were also stations on the underground railroad.²³

Antebellum black entrepreneurs acted on their sense of responsibility to the community by providing many types of concrete aid to community members and by contributing their time and resources to organizations working to benefit the race. Their social responsibility also extended to more symbolic functions. They saw themselves as representing African Americans to the rest of society, charged with the responsibility of proving the moral worth and humanity of blacks. Like middle-class white businessmen of the time, black businessmen preached the necessity for those aspiring to success to be sober and trustworthy in their business dealings. This was important for all entrepreneurs who depended on credit and the promises of associates, but it was especially important to those belonging to a group many presumed to be morally and intellectually inferior. By all reports, it was the unimpeachable conduct of Captain Paul Cuffe and his all-black crew that allowed them to sail up the river to the eastern shore of Maryland, in the heart of slaveholding territory, in the late eighteenth century and to trade unmolested. The Yankee trader with respectable credentials made sure his crew acted with "con-

ciliating propriety" and left Maryland with a valuable cargo of Indian corn.²⁴

When the First Annual Convention of the People of Color met in Philadelphia in 1831, the minutes of the meeting made the values of community leaders clear. They emphasized their belief that the progress of the race and the attainment of black rights depended on "education, temperance and economy"—the values of the growing nineteenth-century middle-class business culture. Among the first orders of business at the convention was the establishment of committees charged with putting these principles into concrete action by raising funds for a college. Intended for location in New Haven, the college was to provide a "scientific" education but also, through a manual training program, opportunities for students to "obtain a useful Mechanical or Agricultural profession." Businessmen, including James Forten of Philadelphia, Thomas Downing of New York, and James Barbadoes and Hosea Easton, then a minister, of Boston, were well represented on the committees.²⁵

For three days in early August 1853, crowds of Boston's black people gathered first at the Twelfth Baptist Church then later at the Belknap Street Baptist Church to listen to a series of lectures from prominent African Americans on the broad theme, "Prejudice and Opportunity." Local leaders, black lawyer Robert Morris, William J. Watkins, Lewis Hayden, and others spoke at length, encouraging debate and "urging the necessity of individual as well as united action." At the invitation of the Boston meeting, Frederick Douglass had come up from New Bedford, where he was lecturing. As one in attendance recalled, "the colored citizens . . . [were] anxious once more to gaze upon the manly form and listen to the thrilling eloquence" of one who had lived among them but had recently moved away to western New York. Douglass was an inspiration to Boston blacks and, indeed, to blacks everywhere. He had sprung from slavery to stand as a living refutation of the charges of inferiority and incapacity leveled at the race. He was what, a century later, African Americans would term a "role model," pointing the way to racial progress. Douglass was certainly not the only living testimony to black achievement, and he urged black people to ensure that future generations would not want for examples of African American achievement.²⁶

Douglass encouraged blacks to learn trades and establish businesses. Whites, even abolitionist friends, could not be depended on, he said, for

too many did “not reduce their theory to practice” by employing blacks in honorable trades or providing apprenticeships for black youth. If African Americans were to improve themselves and the prospects for their race, Douglass argued, “we must . . . do something for ourselves,” and those who had already achieved must pass along their knowledge and skill to the younger people of the race. “Some of us have trades. We must teach them to our children. They must be taught to make boots, as well as black them; to construct bridges, as well as walk over them.”²⁷

There was controversy and a difference of opinion at the Boston meetings over the wisdom of establishing an exclusively black manual labor school, which Douglass favored. Robert Morris opposed the plan, saying that excluding whites “depreciated” the school. Others agreed, saying that there was no advantage to blacks to exclude whites from the school and that Douglass had “somehow missed the mark.” Douglass defended his point, but the matter had not been resolved by the end of the meetings, nor would it be for some time to come. The exchange at this meeting illustrated both the diversity of opinion and the general agreement among free blacks. There was disagreement on whether an integrationist or separatist approach to racial progress would prove most effective, but there was complete agreement on the special responsibility of those who had achieved to “uplift the race.” Racial progress demanded “pursuing an honorable employment, reflecting credit upon themselves, and those with whom they are by complexion and position identified.”²⁸

Throughout the antebellum period, from David Walker’s writing in the 1820s to the public statements and writings of activists in the 1850s, community leaders continued to preach the values of industry and economy and to see their own efforts as contributing to the elevation of the race. Their successes constituted an argument for black equality, and they took on their shoulders the responsibility of proving to their doubting countrymen that they and their fellow African Americans were human beings worthy of full citizenship. George T. Downing, a successful second-generation restaurateur and hotel operator from Providence, was elected president of the national convention meeting in Boston in August 1859. His opening address clearly stated his belief that the advancement of the race depended on the power to be obtained through the success of at least some African Americans. In the fight against racial injustice Downing urged blacks to exercise their right to vote where they could but argued that commanding respect for black rights would also require the attainment of wealth and learning. Downing asserted that

blacks had already demonstrated that they possessed one of the requisites for power in American society—"moral character." Learning and wealth, the other two sources of power and progress for the race he identified, were most clearly the province of black entrepreneurs.²⁹

Notes

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2. *Liberator*, March 12, 1858, reprinted in Thomas R. Frazier, *Afro-American History: Primary Sources*, shorter ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 75.

3. Frazier, *Afro-American History*, 75.

4. This was the opinion of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Roger B. Taney in the Dred Scott case of 1857. Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

5. Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 56-64.

6. Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). For an excellent comparative treatment of African American rights in the North, see Paul Finkelman, "Prelude to the Fourteenth Amendment: Black Legal Rights in the Antebellum North," *Rutgers Law Journal* 17, 3-4 (spring and summer, 1986): 415-82.

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10. W. E. B. Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill, ed., *The Negro American Artisan* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta University, 1912), 35.

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14. Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; Carol Buchalter Stapp, *Afro-Americans in Antebellum Boston: An Analysis of Probate Records* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 164.

15. C. Peter Ripley, ed., *Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 3 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 303 n.
16. Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 3, 387 n; James Oliver Horton, "Generations of Protest," in *Free People of Color* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1993), 41-51.
17. Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; William C. Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968); Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 3.
18. Nell, *Colored Patriots*, 33.
19. Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885).
20. Thomas, *Rise to Be a People*; Wiggins, "Paul Cuffe, Quaker."
21. Nell, *Colored Patriots*; Hosea Easton, "Founded in Avarice," from *A Treatise on Intellectual Character . . .* (Boston, 1837), in Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), 168.
22. Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*.
23. Francis Jackson, "Vigilance Committee Account Book"; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*.
24. Thomas, *Rise to Be a People*, 17.
25. Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 5, 6. This meeting in Philadelphia in June of 1831 was officially called the First Annual Convention, although there had been an earlier organizational meeting in September 1830, also in Philadelphia.
26. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 12, 1853, quoted in John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 441.
27. Blassingame, *Frederick Douglass Papers*, 443. There is a body of evidence to substantiate this charge that white abolitionists discriminated against black workers, made by a number of black abolitionists. James McCune Smith publicly indicted many white abolitionists at the annual meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1852. See Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, and Bertrum Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (New York: Atheneum, 1971).
28. W. H. Logan, speaking before the Boston meeting, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 12, 1853, quoted in Blassingame, *Frederick Douglass Papers*, 444.
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The Secret World of Radical Publishers
The Case of Thayer and Eldridge of Boston



ALBERT J. VON FRANK

THE BOSTON PUBLISHING FIRM of Thayer and Eldridge, doing business at 114-16 Washington Street, lasted little more than a year, from late 1859 to January 1861. From a financial standpoint, they could hardly have picked a worse time to enter the marketplace. The publishing industry had scarcely recovered from the panic of 1857, and failures were still commonplace. Indeed William Thayer and Charley Eldridge were hoping to take advantage of just these conditions—hoping, that is, to make something of the fragments of the bankrupt firm of Dayton and Wentworth, the previous tenants of the premises, where they had themselves been employed as clerks. Although they did well, clearing \$17,000 during their first year of operation, the looming Civil War shut them down. “Capital hid itself,” Thayer later recalled; banks made no loans, debts accumulated, and the market for books, a luxury item in uncertain times, almost wholly dried up.¹

And yet, brief as this career was, it could hardly have had a significant life at any other time, because Thayer and Eldridge were, as Justin Kaplan has called them, “movement publishers,” dedicated to the success of antislavery and radical Republicanism. The firm was also very much the “adventurous publisher” that Ralph Waldo Emerson said it was. The fact that they brought out the much expanded and rather scandalous third edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* seems a brave and slightly anomalous concession to literature in an otherwise solid context of politics and polemics. Understanding who Thayer and Eldridge were and why at this time such a firm should interest itself in Whitman takes us a long way toward understanding the basis of the poet’s appeal at the start of the Civil War.²

When the company was formed, William Wilde Thayer, twenty-nine,

and Charles Wesley Eldridge, twenty-one, bought the stock, plates, and copyrights of Dayton and Wentworth on credit.³ Although they assumed a large debt, there are indications that, in making this speculation, they relied on assurances of support from their wide acquaintance in Boston's antislavery community. Among the persons named by Thayer as interested in the success of the firm were Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and George Luther Stearns, though perhaps the most significant name was that of Frank Bird, the Walpole paper manufacturer and leader of the influential Bird Club, a Republican think tank that engineered the election of abolitionist lawyer John Albion Andrew to the governorship in 1860.

It seems likely if not absolutely certain that Thayer and Eldridge came into existence as part of a larger antislavery strategy to affect the elections of that year. If so, then the firm's first major planned project would have been the campaign biography of William H. Seward, written by Richard J. Hinton and published by Thayer and Eldridge in May of 1860. Seward had earned the respect of the radicals with his speeches on the "higher law" and the "irrepressible conflict" during the previous decade: not only was he their choice for the presidency, but, as the acknowledged leader of the Republican Party, he was almost universally expected to take the nomination. The Boston abolitionists were therefore caught seriously off guard when, on May 18, the nominating convention at Chicago settled instead on Abraham Lincoln, who had been quietly positioning himself as the moderate alternative. Working furiously, Hinton produced the first book-length biography of Lincoln, which Thayer and Eldridge had ready for sale on May 28, only a few days after the Seward volume appeared and just ten days after the nomination was decided.⁴

Hinton's name did not appear on the title page of either of these political efforts because he was then so closely identified with John Brown as to be still under threat of arrest. Born in London in 1830, Hinton had emigrated to America at age eighteen to avoid being prosecuted along with his father as a Chartist agitator. In New York he worked as a journalist and found vent for his radical politics when, in the summer of 1854, he was sent to Boston to cover the trial of fugitive slave Anthony Burns. Not content merely to report the news, he determined to help make it, joining abolitionists Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Martin Stowell in the armed assault on the Boston Court House, where Burns was imprisoned. By 1856 Hinton had moved to Boston and associated himself with Wendell Phillips; as a reporter for

the *Boston Traveller*, he went to Kansas with Stowell's party of Free-Soil emigrants, and, like his journalistic colleagues James Redpath and John Henry Kagi, soon committed himself to the violent, interventionist program of the charismatic John Brown. When news of the raid at Harpers Ferry broke in October 1859, Hinton was on the road to join the conspirators.⁵

James Redpath, a young émigré from Scotland who would become Thayer and Eldridge's best-selling author, had a history very similar to that of his friend Hinton and was every bit as deep into the John Brown affair. Like Hinton, Redpath had been a reporter in Kansas, arriving in 1855 on assignment from the St. Louis *Daily Missouri Democrat*. Earlier he had worked at Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, where he had specialized in reports about slavery. In "Bloody Kansas" his lively reportage paid close attention to the activities of the Border Ruffians and the politicians who favored them. The small band of frontier journalists clubbed together at places like the Whitney House in Lawrence, and in this way Redpath got to know Hinton and Kagi, Free-Soil guerrilla captains such as James Lane, James Montgomery, and John Brown, and visiting partisans such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, with whom on one occasion Redpath observed the arming of two hundred men under Martin Stowell at Plymouth.

Redpath's articles attracted wide attention. Charles Robinson, the Free-Soil governor, thought it "doubtful if Kansas could have been saved from the grasp of the invaders but for the hot shot poured into Atchison, Stringfellow and Co." by the *Missouri Democrat* and its principal writer, Redpath. Though he remained for most of three years headquartered in Kansas, sending back reports to various papers, including the *Tribune*, Redpath made several trips at this time, during one of which, in February 1856, he covered the first national Republican convention, at Pittsburgh. During another trip he reported on Higginson's important disunion convention, held at Worcester in January 1857, at which Frank Bird presided. By 1858, if not earlier, Redpath was fully converted to Brown's militant agenda and became the main envoy between Brown and his principal Eastern backers.⁶

At the time of the Harpers Ferry raid, Redpath was best known for a book entitled *The Roving Editor* (1859), a collection of field interviews with slaves, which he had gathered on several trips through the South between 1854 and 1857. He had been curious to know whether the slaves would support an armed insurrection and had ultimately quit his job at

the *Tribune* to investigate the matter for himself. This book, thanks to Redpath's stenographic training, has still a great value as the only work of the period to capture the living voices of slaves in bondage. Its open advocacy of servile insurrection probably indicates what Redpath was conveying to the Secret Six in 1858 and 1859 about the hopes and strategies of John Brown, to whom, in advance of Harpers Ferry, *The Roving Editor* was dedicated.

According to Thayer's later recollection, it was Redpath's series of pro-Brown articles in the Boston *Atlas and Daily Bee* in the immediate aftermath of the raid that determined him to put their author under contract for a memorial biography.⁷ He induced Redpath with a promise that a share of the profits would go for the relief of Brown's widow and surviving children. Work on the book was begun as early as November 8, as Redpath immediately dispatched his friend Hinton to Kansas to conduct interviews and called on Higginson for access to Brown family papers. He interviewed Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, another of the Secret Six, in Concord in December, at which time, it would seem, he first met Emerson and Thoreau.⁸ The resulting book, *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown*, was issued on January 10, 1860, a little more than a month after the execution. Eventually selling seventy-five thousand copies, it was the greatest commercial and political success that Thayer and Eldridge were to enjoy. The book carried a dedication to Emerson, Thoreau, and Wendell Phillips, three men who had the courage to endorse Brown when so many others found his conduct merely criminal.

When Redpath's book was published, a committee of the United States Senate chaired by Virginia's Democratic Senator James M. Mason had already launched its investigation, with the ostensible purpose of identifying and indicting Brown's Northern backers, most of whom had gone into hiding. One of these was Sanborn, who was making himself scarce by traveling back and forth several times to Montreal. He did not feel that Redpath's book had been helpful, suggesting nervously to Thoreau on January 16 that it had perhaps told "too much" and might make the hanging of good men easier. Redpath had indeed not studied to protect accessories before the fact: his purpose had been to work broadly—even crudely—to affect public opinion, to present to that mass audience with which Thayer and Eldridge were explicitly concerned a heroic portrait of Brown as an idealistic antislavery martyr. Writing to Thoreau on February 6, he expressed the hope that the book "would do good among the masses; that is all I tried to do—for the

educated have teachers enough; and over them I do not expect to have influence." Ten days later, the Mason Committee voted to have Redpath, Sanborn, and several others arrested. Determined, like Sanborn, not to testify, Redpath left Boston and hid out for a month on the Ohio farm of John Brown Jr. When he returned to Boston in April, he finished work on a compilation of tributes to Brown entitled *Echoes of Harpers Ferry*, also for Thayer and Eldridge.⁹

Earlier, in December, when Hinton was on his way back with the results of his Kansas interviews, he happened to arrive in New York the same day as did John Brown's body, which was being transported for burial to the family's farm at North Elba. The determination that Brown not be interred in a coffin of Virginia make gave occasion for a private viewing, which Hinton attended along with the managing editor of the *New York Times*, John Swinton, another veteran Kansas reporter. That evening, as they gazed down at the gray-bearded corpse in the gas-lit railway station, they came to the astonishing conclusion that it looked a good deal like their mutual acquaintance Walt Whitman.¹⁰

Undoubtedly Hinton told this story when he got back to Boston and no doubt also explained that he had first met Whitman in 1855, when the poet brought around to the office of the *Knickerbocker* magazine, where Hinton then worked, a first-edition copy of *Leaves of Grass* for review. Hearing these stories evidently revived in Thayer and Eldridge a recollection of their own strongly positive reaction to the poems in 1855, when, indeed, they had seemed to find their most receptive audience among transcendentalists, Bohemians, and reformers. Flush with income from the Redpath book, Thayer wrote to Whitman early in February, spoke of *Leaves of Grass* as "a true poem writ by a true man," and declared their desire to "be known as the publishers of Walt. Whitman's books, and [to] put our name as such under his, on title-pages." It was a flattering and well-timed appeal, and Whitman, who had no other prospects in the way of a regular publisher, leapt at the opportunity.¹¹

After a brief exchange of letters working out arrangements, an eager Whitman was instructed by Charles Eldridge to put off his arrival in Boston for an additional week. This was because Thayer was just then out of town himself. He had gone to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to participate in a desperate attempt to rescue Aaron D. Stevens and Albert Hazlett, the two remaining unchanged members of John Brown's raiding party. Since January, Thomas Wentworth Higginson and John Le Barnes, an employee of the Boston Water Works, had been concocting

a plan to take the two men by force from the Charlestown, Virginia, jail where the captured raiders had all been held. Higginson and Le Barnes knew a great deal about the layout of the jail, its defenses, and the surrounding terrain, this information having been generated for earlier plots to rescue Brown himself. Richard Hinton, after delivering his Kansas research to Redpath, was sent back west once again, to recruit James Montgomery, then the most prominent of the Free-Soil guerrilla captains and a personal friend of Aaron Stevens, to lead a number of his own men in support of the rescue attempt. The actual assault was to be led by Higginson, assisted by Montgomery and his men and by a group of German 48ers loyal to Karl Heinzen, Boston editor of *Der Pioneer*, whose services had been secured for this operation by Hinton and Le Barnes. Toward the end of February, Thayer arrived on the scene at a "dingy tavern on the outskirts of Harrisburg" with a bag of burglar's tools supplied by Le Barnes and with \$800 of the firm's money, meant to provision the rescuers and to cover the expenses of getting Stevens and Hazlett out of the country.¹²

After conducting a reconnaissance, Montgomery reported that the countryside around Charlestown was crawling with militiamen on full alert; it was clear that a rescue was impossible and the effort suicidal. Thus, though Montgomery and his men were ready and eager to risk all in the attempt, the plan was abandoned on the first of March when Higginson, its author, considering the lives that were now in his hands and might soon be on his conscience forever, ordered the men to return home. Stevens and Hazlett would go to the gallows.

Thayer had a backup plan for his \$800. Before he left Boston, he had been entrusted with the hiding of Charles P. Tidd, the only Harpers Ferry raider still at large in the United States. He had been sent on to Boston by Higginson and had been holed up in Thayer's house for a week, sleeping with a horse pistol under his pillow. Tidd gave Thayer a letter of introduction to some of Brown's relatives who lived in the small town of Tidioute in northwest Pennsylvania. The Drake well at Titusville—the first commercial oil well in America—had been brought in less than two months before Brown's invasion, and these relatives, living just a few miles east of the main strike, were optimistically probing their cornfields. Thayer paid his visit and for a few hundred dollars came away the owner of a half-drilled well. Impatiently, he sold out a couple of months later when Eldridge, the firm's bookkeeper, complained of the expense—just before the thing came in a gusher.

Thayer was barely back in Boston in time to welcome Whitman and to find office space at the compositor's plant where the poet could direct the printers and read proofs.¹³ Whitman was delighted with his new publishers, who, he claimed, "have treated me first rate" and who had given him an entirely free hand in the design of the book. Intent equally on seeing Boston and having Boston see him, Whitman worked at an unhurried pace, generally no more than three hours a day, spending his abundant free time promenading: "I create an immense sensation in Washington street," he declared. "Every body here is so like everybody else—and I am Walt Whitman!" He was indeed a strange, prepossessing, artsy-looking fellow, moving among the uniform black cambric and bombazine of Boston like a gypsy among the Unitarians. He spent all of March 17 with the increasingly respectable Mr. Emerson, who this day failed to secure an invitation from the very Brahmin Saturday Club, but who nevertheless got him reading privileges at the Athenæum. As the two men walked together through Boston Common, Emerson argued the case for prudence against the inclusion of the erotic "Enfants d'Adam" poems. Whitman understood the argument—that it was a barrier to a wider audience—and yet he stood his ground, never doubting the wisdom of his choice of the largest freedom.¹⁴

Whitman was one of two authors whom Thayer and Eldridge put under contract at the same time. The other was William Douglas O'Connor, best known today as Whitman's most strenuous advocate from the early days and author of *The Good Gray Poet*, published in 1866. In his first letter to O'Connor, sent just four days before his first letter to Whitman, Thayer offered to serve as O'Connor's publisher, citing the reputation the latter had established by his short fiction in Putnam's and Scribner's. He had not as yet published a book. The stories that had so much impressed Thayer bore titles like "The Knocker" and "The Ghost" and combined an interest in spiritualism with the literary manner of Edgar Allan Poe, who was very much a hero to O'Connor. On the one hand, the fiction of spiritualism would have appealed to Thayer, whose wife, the former Hattie Langford, had been one of the more considerable of the Boston spirit rappers and table tippers. On the other hand, the presence of Poe in O'Connor's work would have been congenial as a specific indicator of Bohemianism. Poe was the "patron saint" of the Bohemian circle at Pfaff's restaurant in New York, with which Whitman was associated; so also was Poe held in high esteem by the Boston Bohemian circle centered on Benjamin P. Shillaber and his magazine the

Carpet Bag, a group with which, in the early '50s, O'Connor had been associated. Both groups were Democratic, moderately to strongly anti-slavery, non-college-educated with working-class backgrounds, and committed to the humorous assertion of popular values against the pomposity of power and privilege. Thus in February 1860 the only two groups in America explicitly claiming the mantle and reputation of Bohemia in effect came together under the imprimatur of Thayer and Eldridge.¹⁵

Applying their motto to "stimulate home talent and encourage young authors," Thayer and Eldridge invited O'Connor to spread himself out in the writing of a novel and kept him going with advances against royalties during its composition. The result was *Harrington: A Story of True Love*, the plot of which was based on Solomon Northup's 1853 narrative *Twelve Years a Slave* and on the circumstances of the Anthony Burns case of 1854, which O'Connor, like Thayer, had observed firsthand while living in Boston. One of the inducements that Thayer held out to O'Connor was the possibility that he might edit a journal that the firm hoped soon to launch in the very shadow of the new *Atlantic Monthly*, a journal, as Thayer said, that "shall sustain with great ability radical views on the reformatory questions of the day, and combine these with the highest literary character." Among the contributors Thayer was counting on were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, Lydia Maria Child, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.¹⁶

In March of 1860, when Whitman, coming from Brooklyn, and O'Connor, coming from Philadelphia, met in Boston, they found they had a good deal in common, including an important mutual acquaintance: Henry Clapp Jr., the so-called "King of Bohemia" and impresario at Pfaff's. O'Connor had met him when they both lived in Lynn, Massachusetts, where Clapp was editing the *Essex County Washington* and the *Pioneer*. He had since been to France and on his return to America introduced from its source the whole idea of literary Bohemianism, which, in his case, involved becoming a follower of Stephen Pearl Andrews and the free-love movement. From 1858 to 1860, Clapp edited the New York *Saturday Press*, the only journal in America that staunchly and consistently publicized Whitman's poetry. In fact, as recently as December 1859, he had published one of Whitman's very greatest poems, "A Child's Reminiscence" (later titled "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"), and was now closely following the preparations for his friend's new Boston edition of *Leaves*. Specifically, Clapp hoped to sell to Thayer and Eldridge \$100 worth of New York advertising to shore up the paper's

desperately shaky finances. The firm countered, however, by buying a share in the ownership of the *Saturday Press*, no doubt intending that it should become their radical paper. This move, which for economic reasons came eventually to nothing, is nevertheless of great interest, signifying a premeditated effort to league New York and Boston counter-cultures on the eve of the Civil War.¹⁷

Whitman and O'Connor were in Boston on April 3, when, late at night, federal marshals attempted to arrest Frank Sanborn in Concord and haul him before the Mason Committee in Washington. An angry crowd of Concord residents, including Emerson, rushed to his defense in their nightclothes and forcibly prevented an arrest, but Sanborn would be arraigned the next day in Boston, where Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw would decide whether the prisoner should remain in local custody (on a charge manufactured for the occasion) or be turned over to the marshals. The radicals expected an adverse ruling from Shaw, who had expressed nothing but impatience in regard to antislavery over the previous decade, and they were determined that Sanborn should not be taken out of the state.¹⁸

As shown by the plot to rescue Stevens and Hazlett, Thayer and Eldridge had no qualms about the use of violence in service to the cause. They had in fact formed a paramilitary group of "fighting abolitionists" which, as Thayer later recalled, "met in the back part of our publishing house, where we had concealed, ready for use, pistols and ammunition, knives and bludgeons. Our members wore around their necks, under the collar, a narrow black ribbon as a distinguishing mark. We knew each other as 'Black Strings.'" Their principal activity had been (and would continue to be) to provide Wendell Phillips a bodyguard against increasingly violent proslavery mobs, but they were also poised to intervene in fugitive slave cases, should any arise. Six of this group attended the session of the Supreme Judicial Court on the fourth, ready, in the event of a bad ruling, to pull out their guns, seize Sanborn, and rush him off to a waiting carriage. The group consisted of Thayer, Eldridge, Le Barnes, Redpath, Hinton, and one other, believed to have been O'Connor. Wendell Phillips, who had advance knowledge of the plan and encouraged it, positioned himself next to Sanborn during the hearing. Hinton personally escorted Whitman to the courthouse so he could observe. Sanborn recalled having seen the poet, sitting "on a high seat near the door, wearing his loose jacket and open shirt-collar" below the trademark beard. Another cross-room recognition simultaneously occurred as

Marshal Watson Freeman spotted Redpath, for whom also and for the same reason there was a federal warrant out, but before Freeman could move on him, Shaw froze the room by announcing his decision. There would be no bloodshed that day: the chief justice ruled that jurisdiction over Sanborn rested with the Commonwealth, not with the federal government. And there this tense and dramatic matter ended.¹⁹

Whitman stayed on in Boston until May 24, when the first copies of the handsome new edition of *Leaves of Grass* issued from the press. As part of an aggressive and imaginative promotion campaign Thayer and Eldridge turned out a sixty-four-page pamphlet entitled *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, consisting of excerpts from earlier reviews, including several very appreciative ones that Whitman himself had written and a few (including one by Rufus Griswold) that were extravagantly, hysterically hostile. These pamphlets were distributed free of charge to "all persons disposed to commence the study of the Poems." Sales of the book were good, according to the *New York Illustrated News* of June 16, and indeed by then the first printing had been exhausted. The firm later estimated that it sold 3,000 copies before the business collapsed and the plates were auctioned off at the bankruptcy liquidation.²⁰

On May 25, the day after Whitman returned to New York and the day he received his author's copies in the mail, a notice appeared in the *Liberator* calling for a meeting to organize a new antislavery political party. The call was signed by fourteen Boston-area activists, including Thayer, Eldridge, Redpath, and Hinton. The lightly attended convention held the following Tuesday turned out to be a considerable fiasco, in a way that calls the motives of the participants into question. The project was evidently the brainchild of the cranky Stephen S. Foster of Worcester, who, breaking with the settled position of the Garrisonians (including his own wife, Abby Kelley), announced that he had had a change of heart and now regarded the Constitution of the United States as an antislavery charter. This concession to the abstract legitimacy of the government made involvement in electoral politics morally defensible, but since the Republican Party and all its leaders had denounced John Brown as a criminal, would not oppose slavery except in the territories, and would not so much as consider the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, it was evident that a true abolitionist party was necessary.

But Foster was betrayed by his own convention. Redpath boycotted the meeting, sending a letter saying that he "had no faith in conventions, but only in the sword and insurrection" and that he would have "nothing

to do with peaceful agitation." He would in the meantime vote for Lincoln and Hamlin. Hinton spoke in favor of Redpath's position, which he characterized as pragmatic Western forthrightness in contrast to intellectual New England dithering. Wendell Phillips administered the oratorical coup de grâce when, rising at the afternoon session, he gave Foster's scheme "a terrible overhauling" and denounced it as a "farce." The Thayer and Eldridge clique could at no point have supported such a position as Foster laid out; assuming that they knew what it was when they signed the call, one can only surmise that they meant, by making Foster appear ridiculous, to discourage abolitionist defections from the Republican Party. Neither Thayer nor Eldridge spoke at the meeting, but as they often found themselves in agreement with Phillips, whom they especially respected, so it may have been in this case.²¹

There is certainly a fair share of anticlimax in the short history of Thayer and Eldridge—a great deal of "what might have been." Whitman would certainly have been a reliable mainstay for the firm, which indeed had gone some distance toward realizing their intention of "creating an overwhelming demand among the mass public, which shall sweep [adverse critics] and their petty fears, on its resistless torrent." When inventory of the second printing dwindled, they proposed to market the book in both a cheaper and a more expensive format. And at one point they announced as "in preparation" a second book by Whitman, entitled *Banner at Day-Break*, which unfortunately never appeared. When the firm collapsed in January 1861, the stereotype plates of *Leaves of Grass* were secured by Thayer's principal creditor, his old employer, Horace Wentworth, now, as Thayer called him, his most "bitter and relentless enemy." Wentworth subsequently let the plates go at auction to an unscrupulous New York publisher, Richard "Holy Dick" Worthington, who printed and sold an estimated 10,000 copies, from which sale Whitman realized virtually nothing. The far greater benefits accruing to Whitman were the friends and acquaintances he made at this time: Charley Eldridge, who moved to Washington after the dissolution of the firm, helped Whitman to a government job there, and became a lifelong friend; Hinton and Redpath, the journalists, who long remained loyal and helpful friends; and above all, William Douglas O'Connor, with whom Whitman virtually lived in Washington and who came promptly and passionately to the poet's defense when, in 1865, he was fired from his Interior Department clerkship for the alleged immorality of the Thayer and Eldridge edition of *Leaves*. O'Connor's short book

The Good Gray Poet showed the same fierce partisanship for a despised hero that Redpath had pioneered in *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown*, and, like that book, at once created an enduring, nearly mythic, counter-cultural presence and persona.²²

So there was, after all, something alike in Whitman and John Brown that irresistibly appealed to these publishers, some deep challenge to propriety and caution that they felt needed just then to be broadcast. Like the Bohemian and antislavery cultures they represented, they had come to question the insular civility of American public conduct, with—from their view—its peculiar squeamishness about certain of the facts of life, masquerading as elegance of taste or as a defense of moderation. This, if anything, was what the books of Thayer and Eldridge had in common. Neither the respectability of the liberal, already Brahmin-dominated *Atlantic Monthly* nor the routine predictability of the too-pacifist *Liberator* was a suitable vehicle for the impatient energy of a younger generation's outrage over slavery. That energy found an outlet in a new, more muscular aesthetic, which Whitman, for all his reservations about radical abolitionism, seemed to have embodied: careless, casual, daring, equidistant from popular and elite standards of judgment, rooted in working-class values, journalistic, democratic, opinionated, and self-assured. The writing Thayer and Eldridge valued was done with collar-button undone, with broad strokes and passion. "Better," they once told O'Connor, "far better, to be crude and fiery, than polished and dull." The Thayer and Eldridge tone reflected the shifting of the work of book writing onto the shoulders of journalists. And from a certain point of view, the result was observably vulgar. So, at any rate, said Charles Eliot Norton in the *Atlantic* about Redpath's biography of Brown (he didn't care for Redpath's excess of abolitionist "attitude" and thought he had missed a fine opportunity to be judicious); so said a Boston reviewer of O'Connor's *Harrington*, when he bracketed the novel with Whitman's *Leaves* and called them both "sensation books." The same was said of Charles Sumner's only Thayer and Eldridge publication, *The Barbarism of Slavery*, a slashing, intemperate assault on the culture of the slaveholder.²³

The last of Thayer and Eldridge's projects was a rather different kind of attack on the culture of the slaveholder, Harriet A. Jacobs's now famous *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. When Jacobs finished the manuscript in 1859, it was accepted by the Boston publishers Phillips and Sampson on the condition that she arrange for a preface from Harriet

Beecher Stowe. This presented Jacobs with a serious obstacle since Stowe had, years earlier, behaved insultingly and condescendingly toward her and her daughter. Before any alternate arrangements could be made, the firm, which was then also Emerson's publisher, went out of business when its two senior partners died, unexpectedly, within weeks of each other. Eventually the black abolitionist William C. Nell, who had known Jacobs in Rochester and been interested in helping her to publish her work since at least 1854, steered her to Thayer and Eldridge. They too required a sponsoring preface for the pseudonymous narrative and suggested that Jacobs contact Lydia Maria Child, a writer whose services, as has already been noted, the firm was eager to secure. Again Jacobs was reluctant to ask a favor of a celebrity, but Nell easily arranged a meeting at the Anti-Slavery Society office, and author and editor came quickly to an understanding. If bankruptcy could have been staved off for another month, the book would have appeared with the Thayer and Eldridge imprint; as it happened, Jacobs, like Whitman, was caught in the economic backwash. With help from Wendell Phillips, however, and from the Anti-Slavery Society's Hovey Fund, she managed to rescue the plates and the book appeared in 1861 as "Published for the Author."²⁴

Clearly, Thayer and Eldridge were identifying a new audience, as the tottering condition of book publishing at the time demanded, and as others were also doing. Eighteen hundred sixty, the year of Thayer and Eldridge, was also the year of the appearance of Beadle's dime novels, which got their first real foothold on the strength of sales to soldiers. Thayer and Eldridge failed before the war began, but in a sense the spirit of the firm lived on when James Redpath turned publisher and marketed a line of high-quality, low-cost books to the army. It was he who first published Wendell Phillips's *Speeches*, reprinted William Wells Brown's *Clotelle*, and gave Louisa May Alcott her start by publishing the very popular *Hospital Sketches*. No doubt he remembered that Bronson Alcott's daughter had been as forward as Emerson and Thoreau on the subject of John Brown at the time of his trial and execution.²⁵

In the nature of Thayer and Eldridge's choices, in their identification as "movement publishers" with John Brown, the slave, and radical Republicanism, one sees not only the desperate state of politics in 1860, but at the same time something of the direction in which "literature" and its marketing were headed as the publishing industry—strangely helped by a national calamity and by the journalists who would cover it—climbed

out of its slump. The odd coalition of Bohemians, transcendentalists, and antislavery radicals that Thayer and Eldridge represented served, however briefly, as a self-conscious indictment of social, political, and stylistic restraint during a time of escalating pressure, and as a protest against the squelched feelings and moral compromise that mainstream majoritarian politics seemed to require.

Notes

1. Details regarding the activities of William Thayer and the firm of Thayer and Eldridge, unless otherwise indicated, are drawn from the brief manuscript "Autobiography of William Wilde Thayer," dated November 1, 1892, at Indianapolis, Indiana, in the Library of Congress; quoted by permission. The near collapse of the publishing business is indicated in a notice that appeared in the *American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette* for June 22, 1861: "After the next number of this Journal, and until the revival of the Book Trade, we shall issue but one edition per month. The entire absorption of public interest by current events has caused a nearly complete cessation in the demand for new books, and publishers have in consequence discontinued their usual issue." Quoted in Adolph Growoll, *Book Trade Bibliography in the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (1898; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1939), xxviii. The Panic of 1857 resulted in a 30 percent drop in profits for Boston's blue-chip publisher, Ticknor and Fields, while the fiscal year ending in April 1862 was the only period in which that firm actually lost money; see Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 186. On July 22, 1860—well before the war broke out—Lydia Maria Child reported that "the market is now glutted with plates sold by booksellers that have failed" (*Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880*, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia Holland [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982], 356).

2. Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 255; *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton, 10 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939-1995), 5:218.

3. Apart from a few items preserved at the Boston Athenæum, the business records of Thayer and Eldridge have not survived. The firm seems to have taken over Dayton and Wentworth's system of sales agents, as may be inferred from a strange story appearing in the *Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society . . . for the Year Ending May 1, 1860* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1861), 170: "About the middle of December, a book-agent was arrested in Alabama, while soliciting subscribers for 'Fleetwood's Life of Christ,' published at the North. The case was noticed in the Methodist Conference, then

in session, and the members advocated the expulsion of the agent, as needful to the safety of southern institutions. They said in substance, in a paper adopted for insertion in the newspapers of that region: 'We have examined this man's case. We find no evidence of his tampering with Slaves; but as he is from the North, and engaged in selling a book published in the North, we have a right to suspect him as being an Abolitionist, and we therefore recommend, in order to guard ourselves against possible danger, that he be immediately conducted, by the military, out of this county into the next adjoining.'"

Over the years there were many editions by many different publishers of the popular *Life of Christ* by John Fleetwood, but Thayer and Eldridge appear to have had the field to themselves in 1859-60.

4. [Richard J. Hinton,] *The Life and Public Services of Hon. Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, and Hon. Hannibal Hamlin, of Maine* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), and [Hinton,] *Life of William H. Seward* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860). The authorship of these biographies was for a long time something of a puzzle, though Hinton acknowledged them in "Pens That Made Kansas Free," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 6 (1897-1900): 381. Authorship of the Lincoln biography was further established by C. Caroll Hollis, "R. J. Hinton: Lincoln's Reluctant Biographer," *Centennial Review* 5 (Winter 1961): 65-84.

5. Hollis, "R. J. Hinton"; William E. Connelley, "Col. Richard J. Hinton," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 7 (1901-1902): 486-93; Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, 2d ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 282-83.

6. Hart, "James Redpath, Missouri Correspondent," *Missouri Historical Review* 57 (October 1962): 77-78; John R. McKivigan, introduction to *The Roving Editor, or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States*, by James Redpath (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), xiv-xxvi, and 9 n. 4; R. G. Elliott, "The Events of 1856," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 7 (1901-1902): 527.

7. Thayer probably knew Redpath before the articles appeared, since they had one close mutual acquaintance—Francis Jackson Meriam, grandson of the famous Boston abolitionist Francis Jackson. Thayer recalled that Meriam, who participated in the Harpers Ferry raid, had been in the habit of visiting at Thayer's home almost daily until he mysteriously disappeared at the beginning of October. In fact, he had been recruited by R. J. Hinton, with whom Meriam boarded, and by James Redpath, with whom, in January 1859, Meriam had traveled to Haiti to investigate the consequences of a successful revolution by a slave population. See Hinton, *John Brown and His Men* (1894; reprint, New York: Arno, 1968), 569, and John R. McKivigan, "James Redpath, John Brown, and Abolitionist Advocacy of Slave Insurrection," *Civil War History* 37 (December 1991): 304.

8. Redpath's articles in the *Atlas and Daily Bee* attracted much attention;

Ralph Waldo Emerson likely drew on them for the speech he gave at a meeting on November 18 to aid Brown's family (see *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995], 220 n. 2), and Thoreau probably drew on them for his "Plea for Captain John Brown," first delivered on October 30 and widely reported in the Boston papers (Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], 372). Redpath interviewed Thoreau for his recollections of the speeches Brown had given in Concord in 1857 and 1859: see John R. McKivigan, "James Redpath, John Brown, and Abolitionist Advocacy of Slave Insurrection," 293–313. Emerson reports a conversation he had recently had with Redpath and Sanborn in a letter of December 13, 1859 (*Letters*, 8:650).

9. McKivigan, "James Redpath, John Brown, and Abolitionist Advocacy of Slave Insurrection," 310–11; *Liberator*, May 18, 1860, 79; Sanborn, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1909), 207. *Echoes of Harpers Ferry* was dedicated to Haitian President Fabre Geffrard, who was supporting the emigration scheme outlined in Redpath's *Guide to Haiti*, first published by Thayer and Eldridge in 1860. The story of this project is told in Willis D. Boyd, "James Redpath and American Negro Colonization in Haiti, 1860–1862," *Americas* 12 (October 1955): 169–82, and John R. McKivigan, "James Redpath and Black Reaction to the Haitian Emigration Bureau," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 69 (1987): 139–53.

10. Hollis, "R. J. Hinton," 70; Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, 2d ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 356–57. Swinton knew Whitman well, as they were both regular attenders at the Bohemian gathering at Pfaff's restaurant: see *The Correspondence of Walt Whitman*, 6 vols., ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961–1977), 1:74–75 n. 37. He was also an ardent admirer of Bronson Alcott: see *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*, ed. Richard L. Herrnstadt (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969), 219, 221.

11. David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 381; Florence Bernstein Freedman, *William Douglas O'Connor: Walt Whitman's Chosen Knight* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 136. The letter from Thayer and Eldridge (written by Thayer) is given in Fredson Bowers, *Whitman's Manuscripts: "Leaves of Grass" (1860), A Parallel Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), xxxii; it presents the publishers as appreciative readers of the 1855 edition: "When the book was first issued we were clerks in the establishment we now own. We read the book with profit and pleasure." The first two editions of *Leaves of Grass* (1855 and 1856) had been distributed (rather than formally published) by Fowler and Wells, the New York phrenologists. Neither edition was well received, and Fowler and Wells, as John Burroughs said, "quietly asked to be excused from continuing the book" (quoted by Madeleine B. Stern, "The Long and the Short of It: Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*," in *Books and Book People in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1978), 160).

12. Eldridge to Whitman, March 2, 1860, in the Feinberg-Whitman Collection, Library of Congress; Bowers, *Whitman's Manuscripts*, xxxii. Thayer's account of this expedition in his manuscript autobiography is substantially corroborated by Hinton's recollection, given in *John Brown and His Men*, 520-26. See also Tilden G. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 234-36. For Le Barnes, see *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Walter Merrill et al., 6 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971-1981), 4:521-22.

13. The book was printed and bound by Rand and Avery, but according to a statement on the verso of the title page the plates were made at the Boston Stereotype Foundry, on Spring Lane. See Clifton J. Furness, "Walt Whitman Looks at Boston," *New England Quarterly* 1 (1928): 356, for Whitman's visit to the foundry.

14. *The Correspondence of Walt Whitman*, 1:49, 50; Kaplan, *Walt Whitman*, 248-49; Whitman, *Specimen Days and Collect* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882-1883), 191. Whitman spent at least one day touring Beacon Hill in company with Redpath: see Furness, "Whitman Looks at Boston," 357, where Redpath's name is mistranscribed.

15. Freedman, *William Douglas O'Connor*, 96-98. O'Connor's early interest in Poe was strengthened when, in Providence in 1851, he became friends with the poet and spiritualist Sarah Helen Whitman, to whom Poe had been engaged shortly before his death. John T. Trowbridge, another member of the *Carpet Bag* circle, speaks of his enthusiasm for Poe in his autobiography, *My Own Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 184, 335. Poe's influence is also marked in the poetry of Charles G. Halpine, another member of the group. See, further, Cyril Clemens, "Benjamin Shillaber and His 'Carpet Bag,'" *New England Quarterly* 14 (1941): 519-37. That Poe was the rallying point for the New York Bohemians has long been understood: see Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1960), 1-13 and passim. As Emily Hahn notes, "Poe was their great man" (*Romantic Rebels: An Informal History of Bohemianism in America* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967], 12), or, as David Reynolds puts it, "their patron saint" (*Walt Whitman*, 378). Parry (49) and Reynolds (376) both date the beginning of American Bohemianism to November 14, 1854, and the death by suicide of *Tribune* reporter William North; according to Hinton ("Pens," 378), Redpath had been a close friend of North's.

16. Freedman, *William Douglas O'Connor*, 121. O'Connor was working for the Boston *Commonwealth* at the time of the Anthony Burns case in 1854, in which he plausibly claimed to have taken "an active part" (Freedman, 39).

17. Clapp (1814-1875) had been to France in the late '40s, where he worked as private secretary to Albert Brisbane, who had him translate Charles Fourier's writings. Clapp attended the Paris Peace Congress of 1850, with a Massachusetts delegation that also included William Wells Brown, Elihu Burritt, and

James Freeman Clarke, among others (*The Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. C. Peter Ripley [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985], 1:164). Clapp is particularly credited with introducing to America the vision of Bohemia made popular in 1849 by Henri Murger's *Scènes de la Vie Bohème*. He was also the author of *Husband Vs. Wife* (New York, 1858), an argument supporting Stephen Pearl Andrews's free-love doctrines. Clapp's *Saturday Press* (1858–1860), though it was constantly in financial difficulties, had a large circulation and a reputation for sprightliness. For Clapp's request for advertising revenue, see his letters of March 27 and May 14, 1860, in Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 3 vols. (1905; reprint, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1961), 1:236–37 and 2:375–76, and Whitman's letter to Thayer and Eldridge, *Correspondence*, 1:55. O'Connor, who had noticed "A Child's Reminiscence" in the *Saturday Press* the previous December was delighted to meet Whitman, whose poetry he had read enthusiastically in 1855. The copy of *Leaves* he then read had been a gift from his soon-to-be brother-in-law, William F. Channing (a cousin and protégé of Higginson's), who had learned of Whitman directly from Emerson (Freedman, *William Douglas O'Connor*, 81, 103–4; Reynolds, *Whitman's America*, 341).

18. Sanborn, *Recollections*, 208–18.

19. 15 Mass. 399–403 (1869); *Liberator*, April 13, 1860, 59. See the interview with W. W. Thayer in "The Black Strings of 1859," *Sunday Journal* (Indianapolis), August 20, 1893, 9–10; his account is partly printed in Freedman, *William Douglas O'Connor*, 105–6. Sanborn first met Whitman a few days later at the Thayer and Eldridge office: see Sanborn, "Reminiscent of Whitman," reprinted in Joel Myerson, ed., *Whitman in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Memoirs, and Interviews by Friends and Associates* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1991), 143.

20. Whitman, *Correspondence*, 1:48 n. 7.

21. *Liberator*, May 25 and June 15, 1860, 83 and 95, resp. Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: Norton, 1991), 326–27. Thayer named his second son Wendell Phillips Thayer.

22. Whitman, *Correspondence*, 1:48 n. 7; David Goodale, "Walt Whitman's 'Banner at Day-Break,' 1860," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 26 (November 1962): 105–10.

23. Freedman, 109; [Norton,] Review of *The Public Life of Captain John Brown*, by Redpath, *Atlantic Monthly* 5 (March 1860): 378–81. Freedman, 119–20, points out that the *Saturday Press* liked O'Connor's novel, while the *Atlantic* did not. Samuel Gridley Howe and Frank Bird seem to have been involved in promoting the Thayer and Eldridge edition of their friend Sumner's widely reprinted speech, which had been given in the first place to apply pressure from the left on Lincoln and his policies: see David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (1960; reprint, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989), 352, 361–62.

24. Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), xiii-xxxiv, 244-48. Phillips and Sampson's requirement of a preface from Stowe was almost conventional at this time, since she had in a similar way already patronized books by black authors Nell, Josiah Henson, and Frank J. Webb. Child was wary of Thayer and Eldridge because they were "beginners" at an economically difficult time, something she was alert to because her own publisher, C. S. Francis of New York, had recently failed; before the contract was signed she tried to locate a more established house, but "could find none that were willing to undertake it, except Thayer & Eldridge" (245).

25. Madeleine B. Stern, "James Redpath and His Books for the Times," *Publisher's Weekly* 148 (1945): 2649-53; John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 3 vols. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1972), 1:444. In 1863 Redpath was Ellery Channing's first choice to publish his biography of Thoreau (Sanborn, *Recollections*, 386-87). Thayer, too, was not quite done with publishing. George Luther Stearns, another of Brown's "Secret Six," gave him the editorship of his antislavery journal the *Right Way*, published between November 1865 and March 1867 as a more radical version of the *Nation*, with which Stearns, a founder, had become disappointed. Between the bankruptcy and the *Right Way* Thayer held a patronage job under the old Free-Soiler John Gorham Palfrey at the Boston Post Office, a position secured for him by Charles Sumner.

"Lawless and Unprincipled"
Women in Boston's Civil War Draft Riot



JUDITH ANN GIESBERG

ONE DAY AFTER DEADLY AND DESTRUCTIVE draft riots broke out in New York City, draft resistance turned violent in Boston. At around noon on July 14, 1863, two unsuspecting provost marshals entered a home on Prince Street in the city's heavily Irish North End and were greeted by angry women who refused to accept the notifications. One of the marshals threatened to arrest a woman who struck him, and the woman responded angrily. The marshals attempted to leave, but by then a crowd of North End residents had gathered outside the building. Alerted to the trouble by neighbors, employees of the Gas Company Works across Prince Street joined the women and their neighbors. The crowd pursued the two officers as they fled the scene, and when one of them stopped to deliver another notification at the corner of Prince and Commercial Streets, the crowd attacked him.¹ The marshal narrowly escaped the crowd on Causeway Street, where onlookers rescued him.

News of the disturbance spread quickly through the crowded Boston neighborhood, and people rushed into the streets of the North End. Police officers who arrived at the scene to investigate were attacked with bricks and bottles, and at least two of them were seriously injured. The *Boston Daily Journal* described the crowd as "composed largely of boys and a good number of Irish women."² One policeman, Officer Ostrander, was knocked to the ground by members of the crowd who then punched and kicked him repeatedly. Somehow, Ostrander managed to crawl home, but he was pursued by women and children who pelted him and screamed, "Kill the damned Yankee son-of-a-bitch."³

With the police routed, the crowd made their way down to Haymarket Square, where the *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that concerned shopkeepers closed up their shops and "for about forty rods [or more

than 200 yards] the street was completely blockaded.”⁴ According to a reporter from the *Journal*, “an Irish woman was conspicuous in the crowd in Haymarket Square, showing a photograph of her boy who she said was killed in battle and praying that ‘Yankees, Irishmen, and Dutchmen might all be killed.’”⁵ Some members of the crowd remained in Haymarket Square into the evening, when the rioters began looting gun shops and hardware stores. By then, the *Advertiser* reported, the square “presented an exciting scene, filled with a turbid mass of people, including many women, and not a few children, with bayonets and knives quite plenty, glistening over their heads.”⁶

At 8:30 P.M. the armed crowd of North End women and young boys arrived at the armory on Cooper Street, where they were again greeted by police and, this time, by army regulars whom Mayor Frederic Lincoln had called to the scene. “At first they were quiet, but after a while began to make riotous demonstrations, yelling and shouting,” the *Advertiser* reported.⁷ One account suggests that Mayor Lincoln attempted to read the riot act to the crowd gathering at the armory, but no eyewitnesses corroborated this claim.⁸ Members of the crowd then threw bricks at the armory, severely damaging the building and injuring the soldiers inside. Among the injured men at the armory was a Lieutenant Sawin, who was knocked down by a brick and “trampled upon by women, a large number of whom was [*sic*] in the crowd, and added to its fury by their demonic yells.”⁹ Among the brick throwers, the reporter from the *Journal* saw “one Amazonian woman, shouting and screaming, and urging the assailants on in their desperate work. A dozen men were trying to get her away from the scene, but she tore herself from their arms, and with hair streaming, arms swinging, and her face the picture of phrenzy, she rushed again and again to the assault.”¹⁰ On orders from their commanding officer, the outnumbered soldiers in the armory fired their guns and artillery into the crowd. By the time the firing stopped, eight to fourteen people lay dead or dying in the street outside.¹¹ The *Advertiser* named nineteen people who received severe injuries during the day of rioting, including nine soldiers, police officers, and volunteer firefighters; seven children between the ages of ten and thirteen; and three adult men. Indeed, the injuries sustained by the children were particularly serious. A bullet punctured twelve-year-old Dennis Hogan’s lung; thirteen-year-old John McLaughlin had his arm amputated as a result of the bullet wound he sustained; and twelve-year-old Mary Beadman died “from a shot received while present at the riot in Cooper Street.”¹² Four children

died as a result of the injuries they sustained at the riot. It is difficult to count the number of dead and wounded, as some rioters simply disappeared into the crowd after receiving their injuries. The *Pilot* described additional injuries, including a woman who was shot in the neck, carried away by the crowd, and who later died of her injuries. Additionally the newspaper referred to a woman named Henniman, who "was injured by a musketball which entered under her chin, passing backward and producing a serious wound," and a woman named Moore, who was "injured by a charge of shot, which must have been fired by the rioters."¹³

By daybreak, all was quiet. There were a few isolated disturbances reported in the same neighborhood on July 15—a small crowd broke into a bread store on Prince Street and some "roughs" tried to take guns from a store on Endicott Street.¹⁴ City officials, however, breathed a sigh of relief, for it appeared that Boston—and in particular the city's African American neighborhoods—had been spared the extensive destruction and loss of life that resulted from the riots still raging in New York. It took little to imagine how the riot might have developed on its second day, perhaps moving in a westward direction, where the North End crowd might have threatened elite Bostonians ensconced safely and comfortably in their Beacon Hill brownstones, or into the African American neighborhood beyond Beacon Hill, where there might have been racially charged violence. Instead, on July 15, the mayor, Governor John Andrew, and the police department congratulated themselves for putting an end to the disturbance before it spiraled out of control and threatened the lives of the otherwise loyal residents and the good order of the city.

Because it was so quickly contained, the Boston draft riot has received little attention by historians as compared to the New York riot.¹⁵ Yet like New York, the Boston riot provides a glimpse inside the neighborhoods and into the lives of the city's working classes, allowing us to witness firsthand tensions within families that had already lost loved ones or those bracing themselves for that day—insight that might have led to more prudence on the part of the two unwitting officers of the draft. The draft riot reminds us that the war took a heavy toll on Boston's marginal immigrant and working-class women and men who, lacking access to formal political structures, resorted to the informal politics of protest and community resistance to express their opinion of the war and the political questions of the day. Though the immediate crisis seemed to be over, the riot revealed racial tensions among the working

people of the city and was a reminder that Irish Bostonians did not agree with President Lincoln's policy on emancipation. The riot raised serious questions about the inequality of the draft and the inadequacy of provisions made for the wives and families of Massachusetts servicemen. The city's response to the riot became an issue in the fall reelection campaigns of Mayor Lincoln and Governor Andrew. Indeed, six months later the city's leaders were still answering questions about their handling of the one day of street fighting and were publicly justifying their use of force in protecting the armory.¹⁶

Whereas women and young boys perhaps participated in the riot in equal numbers, the prominent role that women played in the attacks on policemen, soldiers, and public and private property fueled the post-riot debate about the city's handling of the matter. In highly gendered language, critics focused on the use of force and on the military fortifications constructed in the city after the riot to raise questions about the legitimacy of the Republican administration of the city. Had city officials overreacted to a crowd made up of angry housewives, resulting in the loss of innocent lives? Or were the soldiers and police officers truly threatened by the attack on the armory and hence justified in firing indiscriminately into the crowd? At stake here was more than simply the city's response to one isolated street disturbance. How would soldiers in the field respond to reports that their wives and children were being shot at in the streets of their own neighborhood? What were the potential political ramifications of the decision to allocate the city's scarce wartime resources to police a mostly female urban population? Was this money that would be better spent on recruitment, supplies for the soldiers, or support for their families? Would it have been better to simply ignore the rioters rather than acknowledge the seriousness of the threat they posed to the safety of police officers and soldiers by firing on them?

This episode suggests that when women clashed with urban authority, their wartime activities on behalf of their families and their neighbors entered political discourse and thus became part of the history of the war. Women's wartime protests form integral parts of what James Scott has called "infrapolitics."¹⁷ As Scott has argued, disfranchised groups commonly resort to everyday acts of resistance in order to survive, and, in these acts, historians can begin to see an informal political culture. Encoded in these regular confrontations with authority are what Scott calls "hidden transcripts" recording the interactions—sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent—between urban residents who wielded very little

power and those who were powerful, between infrapolitics and mainstream politics. The stage for this interaction was the urban street, where in overcrowded working-class and ethnic neighborhoods, women were a significant presence: watching over their children, visiting with relatives, and conducting the affairs of the household and of the extended family. And it was in the street that women confronted city officials, police officers, soldiers, and others in positions of authority. By examining the Boston draft riot through the lens of gender and with an appreciation for infrapolitics, this paper will make two points. First, the riot shows that working-class women were willing to risk arrest or injury rather than silently accept the state's ever increasing demand for sacrifice. Second, the riot (and other similar wartime protests) was significant not because it altered the political landscape of the city or the state but because it exposed the folly of an urban policy that relied on the implicit consent of working-class women to an escalating war and to an evolving set of wartime objectives.

It is not my intention to overemphasize the participation of women in this riot, for, despite exaggerated rhetoric condemning women rioters, there is no reason for modern readers to believe that women were more numerous in this riot than they were in others. Rather, I intend to use the riot as a means of coming to terms with the unique challenges working-class women faced in wartime. War exaggerated all women's disenfranchisement as it removed them further from the seats of power, separated them from their male relatives, and stifled their already muffled political voices. But war accentuated working-class women's economic dependence and marginality particularly. Without male relatives, working-class women faced significant challenges supporting their families in the altered landscape of the Civil War city, where ethnicity was explicitly linked to loyalty and gender stood as a marker of class status. With declining resources at their disposal and little opportunity to be heard, working-class women expressed their opinions of the war via the politics of the streets. Indeed, paralleling the trajectory of national sentiment, working-class women's recruitment efforts in 1861 and their resistance to the draft in 1863 were both political statements about the war aims of the United States government. That I have chosen to focus on how Irish working-class women lashed out at the unfairness of the draft does not mean that I have missed the importance that race and ethnicity played in bringing about the riot. Indeed their changed opinion of the war by 1863 was as much an expression of the racism that they shared with

many Irish and working-class men as it was an expression of the specific challenges they faced as women in the straitened circumstances of war-time. That they expressed their disapproval of emancipation and the high toll the war was taking on their families by rioting rather than by draft evasion or desertion indicates the particular nature of their disfranchisement.

THOUGH THE RIOT was quickly suppressed, it had been costly for the city. Whereas the adjutant general estimated the city spent \$14,495 in riot protection, the chief of police put the figure at \$30,000.¹⁸ These estimates do not appear to include the costs of repairs to the armory, where the damage was significant. Owners of looted shops at Dock Square and Faneuil Hall Market sued the city for damage done to their personal property during the riot.¹⁹ The police made arrests throughout the night and into the next morning, and the wounded were treated at Massachusetts General Hospital.²⁰ Whether the city made any arrangements for the families of those killed by the soldiers is unclear.

Though for a brief moment the city had braced itself for the worst, postwar accounts of the home front simply ignored episodes of discontent like draft and bread riots and instead painted a picture of feminine patriotism and self-sacrifice. Mary Livermore, temperance activist and wartime nurse, contributed to this image when she glowingly remarked on the patriotic women of her hometown: "To name them all would be almost like publishing a directory of the city."²¹ To make her point, Livermore named quite a few local women, all of them middle-class members of Boston's high society, who had given up the comforts of their own homes to distribute supplies and nurse wounded soldiers. Livermore's description of self-sacrificing Northern women is an example of what seems to have been a carefully cultivated postwar amnesia. This amnesia served a postwar need to see unity where there was none, and it allowed Northerners to ignore some of the more unsettling questions raised about gender and class during the war. The wartime activities of the women that Livermore anthologized fit neatly into middle-class assumptions about femininity and domesticity. Women holding up pictures of dead sons or taking to the streets to save their husbands, sons, and brothers from the draft were not only disloyal but unfeminine.

Clearly these tributes to feminine self-sacrifice were intended to appeal to Livermore's middle-class readers who *wanted* their individual contributions of aid for the soldiers to be published and read by others in

their social circles. Because of these postwar “directories” of prominent women, historians have recently begun to understand the extent to which middle-class women became involved in the war, raising money, collecting supplies, and even volunteering as nurses. In these ways, middle-class women’s wartime sacrifices have begun to be counted. The wartime sacrifices made by working-class and immigrant women were not included in Livermore’s anthology and are by their nature harder to identify.

Like their middle-class counterparts, working-class women collected supplies, knitted socks, sewed uniforms, and nursed soldiers. They took on more work to support their families. They took in boarders or combined households to save money. Perhaps they sought help from parents or neighbors—maybe even resorted to petty crime—when these measures fell short. Modern historians know very little of these wartime experiences, for when the war was over, working-class women did not publish memoirs. They left few letters and no diaries in which they might have reflected on their wartime experiences. Though biased and incomplete, newspaper and official reports of draft riots, bread riots, and other disturbances of this sort provide historians the opportunity to learn more about working-class women and the plight of their families.

Yet the absence of written documents does not in and of itself explain why working-class women have been written out of the history of the Civil War home front. The working-class wives and mothers of Boston’s soldiers took a keen interest in the progress of the war, lobbied military officials, and wrote letters on behalf of their soldier-relatives. In Boston’s North End, women sought out priests who could help them to locate baptismal or other records that could be used to prove that their husbands or sons were not United States citizens and, hence, might qualify for a draft exemption.²² The records of Massachusetts’s all-Irish Ninth Regiment contain letters from mothers, wives, and sisters of soldiers. When her son Michael H. McNamara was denied a promotion to second lieutenant for alleged misconduct, for example, Mrs. McNamara went to the adjutant general’s office requesting that he look into the matter. Whether her son ever won his commission is unclear, but Mrs. McNamara won over the adjutant general, who wrote on her behalf to Governor Andrew. “Mrs. McNamara informs me that she has three sons in the regiment, one of whom was wounded at Gaines Mills,” he explained, and added that, in his opinion, “[s]he appears like a deserving woman and is very anxious that her son Sergt [*sic*] McNamara receives a

commission."²³ Not all women who made concerned inquiries to army officials reached sympathetic ears. Nellie Davis addressed a Massachusetts army officer about a teenaged brother who had been drafted into the Ninth, but the general recommended that Governor Andrew ignore the request because "there are many thousand mothers and sisters whose cases are equally so, and the case as presented, is not one that can be made an exception to the rule of the Department, nor (as the enlistment was voluntary) is there any assurance, that the young man if discharged would not repeat the act, if again pressed by the same circumstances."²⁴

The bulk of the correspondence refers more explicitly to the home front "circumstances" that led to underage boys registering for the draft and to mothers lobbying for promotions and pay raises. These letters allude to the financial strain faced by families suffering from a loss of male income. Anne Henry addressed the governor directly, requesting financial support from the state while her husband served in the Ninth. Henry appealed to Andrew's sympathy when she added, "I have two children and no support. I wish you would answer this letter. I wish you to let me know if I can draw pay since [my husband] enlisted 3 months ago."²⁵ Margaret Leahy, of the Irish neighborhood of South Boston, directed her request for aid to the mayor. "I had an only son who was my only support, until last April, when he enlisted in the Ninth Mass Regiment," Leahy began. Though Leahy had managed to support herself for one year without aid from her son or from the state, she was no longer able to. "[N]ow I am in a destitute condition and am obliged to appeal to you, not doubting, but you will see that justice will be done me," Leahy entreated the mayor.²⁶

While Henry's and Leahy's letters suggest a level of social status and education, other letters were clearly written by women with little formal education and even less information about how to seek support from the state. Susan Hinckley's letter to Governor Andrew dated July 13, 1862, is a case in point. Writing from Greenfield, Maine, Hinckley first requested "in regard to when the 9 Regt of your State and whear it was filled up and gave me the town name whear it was filled." Then Hinckley explained the reason for her inquiry, adding that she had "a husbon whitch inlisted in that regt and I stand in need of some of his pay whitch I have not rec eny." As if an afterthought, Hinckley added, "PS. My husbon name is John C. Hinckley, 9th Mass Reg ment."²⁷ The wife of Daniel Mahoney appealed for aid in person at the offices of the Massachusetts Military State Agency in Washington, D.C., when her husband

was arrested for desertion. After his arrest, the agent in Washington explained, Mahoney was sent back to the Ninth Regiment, "leaving a wife and three children under six years, very destitute."²⁸ Mahoney left no written record of her attempt to support three small children in an unfamiliar city, but the bureaucrat in Washington believed the case worthy of his attention and of a response from Andrew. Without her husband, Mahoney's wife sought money in order to return her young family to Massachusetts, where perhaps her financial situation might remain the same but at least she could rely on the support of her friends and neighbors.

As long as their soldier-relatives were alive, women's requests for state support could be readily validated by writing to a husband's or son's commanding officer. Claims placed by relatives of dead soldiers were more difficult. In the spring of 1863, Mrs. McCormack, a resident of Boston's North End, appealed to Governor Andrew for help burying her son, who died after serving two terms in the army. The governor was skeptical of McCormack's request and sent a representative to her house to investigate. Without the original discharge papers on hand, McCormack had little hope of receiving the money necessary to give her son a proper burial, though the young veteran lay dead in a coffin at her home at 219 Hanover Street. Indeed, despite the fact that he saw the young man's body at his mother's home, the governor's representative cast doubts on McCormack's credibility and morality when he suggested that, in contrast to this applicant, "[t]he worthy and respectable poor will perish, from want, rather than seek relief."²⁹ The state's money might be better spent, the author implied, were it not used to help this unworthy Irish woman to bury her dead son. Surely official callousness like this did nothing to help Andrew's reputation in the working-class Irish neighborhoods of the city. Neither did the timing of the draft a few months later.

The temporary loss of male income hit immigrant and working-class families hard. By 1863 letters from home often complained of wartime inflation and rising prices. Growing government demand forced staples like beef, coffee, sugar, eggs, and bread to double in price from 1861 to 1863. During the same period coal and wood prices went up significantly, and clothing even more.³⁰ These dramatic increases in the everyday costs of supporting a family might have been easily absorbed by some families, but the absence of male wage earners left working-class women to support their families on substantially diminished resources. Irish working-class women were experts at managing the meager resources of their

families, but even so, they could only scrape by for so long without funds from their husbands, sons, or fathers.³¹ Some managed for a year or more, some for only a few months, but when they could wait no longer, working-class women went in search of information and relief.

By 1863 many women in the Irish neighborhoods of Boston received word that their husbands or sons had died in battle. Though distinguished on the battlefields of the Civil War, Boston's Irish regiments had lost many men in the year preceding the riot. The Ninth Regiment lost approximately 200 men in the disastrous Peninsular Campaign in the summer of 1862. At Antietam in September 1862, Boston's Twenty-eighth Regiment took heavy losses, and in December 1862, at the Battle of Fredricksburg, that same regiment lost nearly half its soldiers.³² News about the dead and wounded from Gettysburg was just beginning to reach New England days after the battle, July 1-3, 1863. Amidst July Fourth celebrations in Boston, Father Hilary Tucker complained, "God knows we have very little to be proud of today, when our country is drenched in blood; when scarcely a family in Massachusetts has not to mourn over some member of its fireside, now at this very moment, either stretched a lifeless corpse or bleeding on the awful and most bloody field of Gettysburg."³³ In his private reflections, Tucker not only took note of the great loss of life on the battlefield but perhaps expressed his own reservations about emancipation.

With so many in mourning for the dead of the beloved Irish regiments of the city, Boston's archdiocese planned a special Requiem mass for the morning of Tuesday, July 14. The plans for a solemn ceremony recognizing the dead took on added significance for Catholic priests in Boston's Irish neighborhoods when news of the first day of rioting in New York reached the city on the evening of July 13. In response to the news from New York, a group of young men held an impromptu meeting at St. Mary's church on Endicott Street, just around the corner from the Cooper Street Armory.³⁴ Whether the young men at the meeting planned an antidraft demonstration is unknown, but Boston was alive with talk about the violence in New York and predictions about whether Boston would experience similar unrest. In fact, Father James Healy of the archdiocese had received assurances that, as a gesture of sympathy for the great losses suffered by the North End community, "several of the state functionaries" would attend the Requiem.³⁵ Perhaps the governor or mayor planned to attend the mass in order to reassure Boston's Irish community that the city appreciated and continued to count on

their loyalty. Instead, a heavy rain on Tuesday morning kept official attendance down.³⁶ Maybe the inclement weather prevented Governor Andrew and Mayor Lincoln from attending the mass that morning, but surely prudence would have advised them to call off the draft for the day.

Although there is no way to know who attended the mass, it is easy to imagine that women were well represented in the church pews that morning. Women dressed in black listened as the names of dead soldiers were read and cried quietly when they heard the names of friends and loved ones. These same women then made their way through the rain to their homes, where, once left alone with their thoughts, they perhaps wondered sadly how many more men had to die before this war ended. For these women, as for others, a knock on the door from an officer of the draft was surely an abrupt answer to the question of "how many more" and an unwelcome reminder that the war that had already taken so many young men's lives continued.

That Irish women were seen chasing and assaulting draft marshals and police officers in the streets of the North End that day, then, is hardly surprising. Indeed, historian Hasia Diner traces the "long Irish tradition that called upon women to assert themselves, particularly in the home." Transplanted to the crowded streets of urban America, this tradition of female assertiveness "thrust [women] into positions of power and authority" in Irish homes and neighborhoods.³⁷ Though the riot appears indeed to have been spontaneous, when the two draft officers accosted these women in their own homes—just when their thoughts were filled with images and memories of the men who were gone—they initiated a chain of events that might as well have been rehearsed. Charged with the protection of their homes and families, women verbally challenged and then attacked the draft marshals who appeared at their doors that afternoon as symbols of the growing power of the state and the inhumane policy of using the poor to fight a war from which the rich would benefit. Here the women could count on the cooperation of their community, for when the noise from the original confrontation reached their neighbors' ears, a crowd surrounded the marshals to weigh in on the unfairness of an official policy that exempted the rich from serving their country but left the poor no way out. Father Tucker voiced the sentiment of his parishioners, with whom he agreed: "A great injustice has been done to the poorer classes, in the draft, in making the fine

\$300, for a substitute, equal for the rich millionaire, and the poor hod carrier."³⁸

When the police tried to interfere with the vigilante actions of the crowd, they too became its victims. The growing crowd then moved toward the gun shops at Dock Square and Faneuil Hall Marketplace, where rioters began seizing weapons in preparation for the next stage of their protest. Like the officers of the draft, the Cooper Street Armory served as a symbol not only of a war of emancipation that these working-class women and men no longer supported but also of an urban administration that generally ignored home front deprivation rather than initiate policies to mitigate it. Perhaps it also represented federal power that, like the draft, was an unwelcome presence in the streets of the working-class neighborhood. When women and young men were shot down without warning, this unwelcome federal power added more poor and immigrant names to an already long list of wartime casualties.

In the aftermath of the riot, eyewitnesses, politicians, and newspaper reporters disagreed about who was to blame for the destruction of property and the loss of life. Republican-owned newspapers such as the *Boston Journal* joined middle-class city residents in praising Mayor Lincoln and law enforcement officials and in condemning Irish Americans—Irish women, in particular. Boston resident Emma Sellew Adams, for instance, recalled how her mother and another woman had helped protect a policeman who had become a victim of the crowd. In exaggerated language, Adams described the crowd that night and in particular railed at the intemperate actions of Irish women at the armory who, in the midst of the violence and destruction, according to Adams, held "their babies in their arms . . . daring the soldiers to fire at them."³⁹ Reflecting nativist stereotypes and Victorian gender expectations, Adams and other middle-class and elite Bostonians dismissed the Irish women in the crowd as wild and unwomanly. Like other middle-class Boston residents, Adams applauded the city's use of force in putting down the riot, for once the Irish women in the crowd ceased to be women, they were no longer deserving of "the protection of their sex."

An anonymous account written by "a North End mechanic" who "took a humble part" in the riot was understandably more sympathetic concerning the presence of women and children at the riot.⁴⁰ Though the author considered himself intensely patriotic, he condemned the soldiers for their ready resort to force and the mayor for overreacting when "he nervously imagined he foresaw an opposition to the government

draft, because some women and children had collected in one of our streets."⁴¹ For this North End mechanic, the predominance of women and children in the crowd served as proof that the police and the military were never in any real danger and that a strong and decisive appearance by the mayor could have stopped the riot before it ended in bloodshed. Unlike the middle-class Adams, who was shocked and threatened by the actions of Irish women in the crowd, this anonymous working-class participant saw nothing unusual about this "collection" of women and was convinced that city officials had overreacted. Still possessing their femininity, these women posed no threat to the draft marshals, the soldiers, or the mayor.

But one senses a level of disingenuousness in the author's ready dismissal of the threat posed by the female rioters. Clearly, the two primary targets of the riot—the draft officers and the United States armory—suggest that the rioters were indeed lashing out at the government, military, and the administration of the draft. Irish women were traditionally charged with the protection of their families and their communities, and often they were involved in serious—and, at times, violent—protests against landlords in the Irish countryside.⁴² Indeed the significance of Irish women's resistance was recognized by the Molly Maguires, who dressed as women in order to feed the fears of English landlords, who, as Kevin Kenny explains, equated "violence and disorder with the feminine and the irrational."⁴³ Dismissing the seriousness of the riot because of the lead role played by women allowed the author to criticize the mayor's weakness by tapping into Victorian notions of female frailty. The author leveled this criticism, however, by carefully evading the truth about the long tradition of Irish women—both real and symbolic—fighting economic and political injustice. The opportunistic explanation offered by this North End mechanic had little to do with the motivations of the women who took to the streets to protest the draft. On July 14, Irish women entered the streets of Boston to protest what they believed was an invasion of their homes and their community by unwelcome representatives of an unresponsive government. That Irish women were the instigators of the politically charged violence did nothing to change the fact that the riot had posed a serious threat to the administration of the city and the state.

The post-riot debate in Boston was distinctly gendered and formed part of a larger dispute underway in Northern and Southern cities during the Civil War about unruly and disruptive women. On one hand, there

was reluctance—informed by Victorian notions about women's superior morality, political naïveté, and physical weakness—to believe that women were capable of politically charged wartime resistance. On the other hand, the seriousness of the official response suggests an emerging sense that, like men, women were indeed capable of and should be held responsible for these types of partisan or criminal behavior.

Individually, incidents of disruptive female behavior, such as Boston's draft riot, appear to be isolated acts, brought on by extreme circumstance, in an overall history of feminine patriotism and quiet wartime sacrifice. Together, however, women's wartime protests suggest that poor and working-class women resented the disruption brought on by the war and were convinced that government officials were mismanaging the war. Working-class women accustomed to monitoring their communities and meting out justice in the streets acted on their conviction that the burden of the draft rested too heavily on the shoulders of immigrant men. Contrary to the postwar tendency to focus on the unanimity of purpose among women and men, direct action—collective and individual—taken by working-class women provided a distinct challenge to local officials and prompted swift and serious responses.

In cities throughout the North and South, local officials were at odds with women—some middle-class and elite, even—whose conduct was disruptive and disrespectful and that drained urban resources earmarked for wartime urban protection from enemy invasion, for recruitment, and for other inevitable wartime expenses. In this context, the added costs of policing a city's female population took on political significance as it clearly, if temporarily, redirected attention—and sometimes manpower—from the war front to the home front. In most cases, local officials were reluctant to admit as much, however, for fear of the long-term consequences of altering the unequal balance of power between women and men—women were supposed to be passive, not active, citizens. Any explicit measures taken to police women's behavior during the war implied that women's actions were politically significant. Historians have made this case most effectively in the case of two Southern cities—New Orleans and Richmond.

Drew Gilpin Faust has explored these conflicting interests in her account of Union-occupied New Orleans. In 1862 Massachusetts Major General Benjamin Butler issued General Order 28 prohibiting women from mistreating United States soldiers occupying the city of New Orleans. In this infamous order, Butler promised to treat as common pros-

titutes prominent Southern “ladies” who spat on or otherwise insulted soldiers, insisting that these actions were politically motivated and that, despite Victorian stereotype, women should be held criminally responsible for their insubordination.⁴⁴ The long-term significance of General Order 28, Faust suggests, however, was not lost on the Northern and Southern publics. Universal criticism of the order resulted in the removal of Butler—or “Beast Butler,” as he was known in the newspapers—and a retreat to a more traditional army policy that dismissed women’s behavior as an annoyance rather than a serious threat to public order.

Similarly, newspapers in Richmond blamed Yankee agitators, foreigners, “thieves,” and “harlots” for the bread riots that erupted in the city on April 2, 1863, implying that these trespassers—not loyal upstanding Southern women—were capable of such behavior.⁴⁵ Yet in an essay on the riots, Michael Chesson showed that this dismissal of the Richmond riots by the Southern press belies the seriousness with which the city responded to the riots. After several attempts were made to disperse the crowd by both President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis and Virginia Governor John Lechter, the governor called out the Public Guard and threatened to fire on the women if they did not disperse. In the days that followed, Chesson found that forty-four women (and twenty-nine men) were arrested for their roles in the riot, as were women who expressed sympathy for the rioters, and a distinct military presence was maintained in the streets of Richmond with troops and cannon placed in prominent places throughout the city.⁴⁶ Once again, as in the case of Boston and New Orleans, prevailing assumptions about women’s loyalty and natural weakness were put to the test by Richmond women willing to take the law into their own hands.

One senses a similar sort of denial in the conclusion reached by Boston’s Chief of Police John Kurtz, who was sure that the draft riot “was no superficial affair, but a formidable combination, backed up by influential parties, who dared not show themselves publicly.”⁴⁷ Kurtz probably expressed the belief of many who were reluctant to see the draft riot for what it was—a politically charged protest led by local women. But whether they discounted the role of women in the riot or denied the rioters their femininity, Bostonians from Beacon Hill to the North End faced an altered urban landscape on July 15, 1863. The day of street fighting begun by a part of the population from whom the city expected unqualified loyalty forced residents to reconsider other relationships

based on such unquestioned assumptions and on fragile hierarchies of class and gender.

Whereas the military ended the Richmond riots by warning the women that they would be fired upon, in Boston soldiers guarding the armory fired on the demonstrators apparently without warning. Precautions similar to those in Richmond were taken after the riot. Several army units were stationed at the Cooper Street Armory and at Faneuil Hall, where five cannon were placed at various places throughout the square. Governor John Andrew called in companies of soldiers from Charlestown, Roxbury, Cambridge, Somerville, and Medford to report for duty in Boston. Observing the precautions taken by the city to prevent further disruption on the morning after the riot, a reporter for the *Journal* remarked that "[t]he appearance of Dock Square and the neighborhood of Faneuil Hall this morning is eminently warlike."⁴⁸ And perhaps most telling, in direct response to the draft riot, Boston's police officers began to carry weapons, when they had not regularly done so before.⁴⁹

The draft riot in Boston brings into sharp relief the emerging wartime debate about how to respond to women who challenged accepted urban authority. Boston's politicians and law enforcement officials responded to the threat posed by women's disruptive behavior, suggesting that despite gendered rhetoric, the city understood that women posed a unique and serious challenge to the maintenance of order. Several days after the riot, in the wake of questions about his failure to confront the crowd early in the day, Mayor Lincoln publicly warned "the lawless and unprincipled, that the authorities have the means at hand to enforce good order, and maintain the rights of every citizen." In an effort to sound resolute to his dubious constituency, Lincoln added, "The fair fame of our city is too precious to be stained by lawless mobs—peace and good order must be preserved at all hazards."⁵⁰ The city's policemen and soldiers who dedicated themselves to preventing additional episodes of female rioting spared Mayor Lincoln and Governor Andrew further embarrassment and helped secure their reelections in the fall of 1863.⁵¹

While the mayor delivered speeches warning against further challenges to the good order of the city, the Common Council and the Board of Aldermen considered legislation that directly answered criticisms made by the women about the unfairness of the draft. For two weeks after the riot was over, these two governing bodies of the city of

Boston considered a bill authorizing the city to pay “the commutation fee of such of the citizens of this City liable to military duty and drafted into service of the United States, who have families dependent on them for support.”⁵² Responding directly to the cause of the riot with this proposed legislation, the city sought a way to help working-class men exempt themselves from the draft, allowing them to stay home, where they could continue to contribute to the support of their families. Surely this solution was preferable to the state’s driving more working-class families to destitution with the temporary or permanent loss of a primary male wage earner and would perhaps prevent future disturbances of the sort the city endured on July 14, 1863. This solution was more farsighted than putting soldiers on the streets of the working-class neighborhoods or arming police officers with pistols. Keeping one male wage earner for a family at home could potentially save the city and the state the long-term costs of providing aid to a wartime widow and orphans. Though in the end the Board of Aldermen discovered that paying commutation fees for draftees violated state law, the proposed legislation suggests that whereas Lincoln publicly dismissed the rioters as lawless vigilantes, lawmakers saw their point about the inequalities of the draft.

THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTIONS such as this riot, working-class women entered the wartime debate about urban safety and the legitimacy of local wartime policies. These women, disfranchised because of their sex and disenchanting because of their ethnicity and class, intruded themselves into the high history of the war by refusing to allow their own sacrifices or those of their community to go unrecognized. Participating in infrapolitics, working-class women’s actions nonetheless influenced high politics. They expressed skepticism about the leaders of the city and of the state, and they resisted a federal wartime policy that they believed was unfair and undemocratic. Not content to be symbols of the city’s patriotism or the state’s self-sacrifice, women asserted their knowledge of and a desire for positive citizenship. Though reluctant to make too much of it, the city of Boston was forced to allocate resources and to initiate a plan for policing women in the city streets. When city officials did so, they engaged these women in the informal politics of the streets—an arena in which working-class and immigrant women enjoyed a distinct advantage.

Notes

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1. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1863.
2. The injured men were identified as Officer Curtis Trask and Officer Winship. *Boston Daily Journal*, July 15, 1863. In an article published in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 17, 1863, Officer Ostrander also reported how he was brutalized by the crowd.
3. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 17, 1863.
4. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1863.
5. *Boston Daily Journal*, July 15, 1863.
6. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1863.
7. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1863.
8. John Kurtz, *Annual Report of the Chief of Police*, City Document No. 6 (1864), 33, *Boston City Documents* (Boston, 1865). City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass.
9. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1863.
10. *Boston Daily Journal*, July 15, 1863.
11. In "A City of Mobocrats and Tyrants: Mob Violence in Boston, 1747-1863," Michael Hindus estimates the casualties at fourteen. *Issues in Criminology* 6, no. 2 (summer 1971): 77. Michael Hanna estimates eight in "The Boston Draft Riot," *Civil War History* 36, no. 3 (1990): 268. "At midnight, the police were called again to the Armory to help battle a fire set by rioters who had gathered to finish the work of destroying the building." Kurtz, *Annual Report*, 34.
12. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 16, 1863.
13. *Pilot* (Boston), July 25, 1863.
14. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 16, 1863.
15. No extensive study of the Boston riot has been conducted to match Bernstein's excellent work on the New York draft riot. Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
16. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 17, 1863.
17. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 183.
18. William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1868-1871), 480. Kurtz, *Annual Report*, 37.

19. See Board of Aldermen Records, vol. 41 (1863), and Records of the Common Council, vol. 24 (1863), City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass.

20. Hanna estimated that twelve people were brought to trial for the part they played in the riots. Hanna, "Boston Draft Riot," 272. It is difficult to estimate how many rioters were arrested and tried. The local newspapers listed some names of people tried explicitly for the riots; others appear to have been charged with looting. Clearly these two actions are related. I counted eleven reported arrests in the news stories I considered. Of the eleven arrests that I could link to the riots and the looting that accompanied the riots, two women were named. Ellen Waterhouse and Ann McGrath were tried and sentenced to six months each in prison for stealing. "Criminal Matters. More Rioters in Trouble," *Boston Daily Journal*, July 16, 1863.

21. Mary Livermore, "Massachusetts Women in the Civil War," in *Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861-1865* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1895), 2:593.

22. Reverend Hilary Tucker mentions this in a diary entry of July 22, in which he explains, "[a]fter supper continued my reading, made two marriages, attended to several calls, of poor distressed men, or wives or sisters or mothers, who either want baptismal or marriage certificates to try to prove an exempt from this draft." Hilary Tucker, *Diary of Reverend Hilary Tucker, 1862-1867*, vol. 1, July 22, 1863, RG VII.11.1, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

Brian Shortsleeve explains that Irishmen who could prove that they were not citizens and had not declared their intent to seek citizenship were exempt. Others sought help from the British consul's office, where officials charged applicants three dollars for a document proving British citizenship. Brian Joseph Shortsleeve, "Sons and True Patriots: Boston Irish Politics in the Civil War Era" (B.A. honors thesis, Harvard University, 1995), 108-10.

23. Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, Massachusetts Archives, Dorchester, Mass., Executive Department Letters (GO1/567x).

24. Brigadier General [unintelligible] to Governor Andrew, December 1, 1863, Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 118.

25. Anne Henry to Governor Andrew, July 18, 1861, Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 7.

26. Margaret Leahy to "Hon Joseph M. Wightman," Boston, March 15, 1862, Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 26.

27. Susan Hinckley to Governor Andrew, Greenfield, Maine, July 13, 1862, Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 30.

28. Gardiner Tufts to Governor Andrew, Massachusetts Military State Agency, Washington, D.C., [no date], Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 119.

29. Maurice O'Connell to Governor Andrew, May 4, 1863, Ninth Regiment Records, vol. 25, no. 90.

30. Peter J. Parish, *The American Civil War* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975),

340-63. Phillip Shaw Paludan, *"A People's Contest": The Union and the Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 182. Paludan also notes that in 1863 wages increased by 50-60% and prices went up almost 100%; rents and fuel also went up dramatically.

31. Hasia Diner explains that Irish women traditionally managed the family finances in Ireland and in America. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 17-20.

32. Shortsleeve, "Sons and True Patriots," 105.

33. Tucker, Diary, July 4, 1863.

34. Father James Augustine Healy was keeping Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick's diary while he was in Europe. Bishop's Journal, RGI.I, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

35. Bishop's Journal, July 14, 1863.

36. Tucker fretted about the low attendance. He also worried that the sermon given by Reverend Scully might have done more to excite the attendees than it did to bring them peace. Tucker suggested that instead of sticking to the subject of Union war dead, Scully appealed to his audience's Irish nationalism when he connected the Union dead to Irish mercenaries who died while fighting English wars in Europe.

37. Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 69.

38. Tucker, Diary, July 17, 1863.

39. Emma Sellew Adams, "A Remembrance of the Boston Draft Riot," *Magazine of History* 10 (July 1909): 39.

40. "The Boston Riot, July 14, 1863: A Plain Statement of Facts by a Plain Man" (Boston, 1863), 8, 9.

41. *Ibid.*, 13.

42. Kevin Kenny discusses women and cross-dressing men in his study of the Molly Maguires. Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10-12.

43. *Ibid.*, 12.

44. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1996), 207-14.

45. Michael Chessen, "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92, no. 3 (April 1984): 137.

46. *Ibid.*, 155, 169, 172-73.

47. Kurtz, *Annual Report*, 34.

48. *Boston Daily Journal*, July 14, 1863.

49. Roger Lane, *Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 134. The Boston Police Department underwent other adjustments during the war as the department's approach to policing the city came under increased scrutiny in the heated rhetoric of wartime politics. On several occasions Republicans pushed the police to crack down on the illegal

sale of liquor in the city, and the police department, backed by Democrats who did not want a stronger police presence, resisted these Republican-sponsored reforms. Lane, 130–32. For those who might mistakenly chalk up the BPD's wartime laxness on this issue to the presence of Irish police officers, Lane notes that there were no Irish police officers in 1861 and that by 1866 there were forty-one. Lane, 141.

50. F. W. Lincoln Jr., "Mayor's Communication Respecting the Control of the Recent Riot," July 23, 1863, City Document No. 75, 6, *Boston City Documents* (Boston, 1863), City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass.

51. Thomas O'Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 184–85.

52. Board of Aldermen Records, vol. 41, July 27, 1863, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass.

Portrait of a Parish
Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Boston's
Cathedral of the Holy Cross, 1865-1880



JAMES M. O'TOOLE

ON WHAT A NEWSPAPER DESCRIBED as "one of our lovely fall days," an impressive ceremony unfolded at a building site in Boston's South End. A crowd estimated between twenty and twenty-five thousand began to assemble well before noon on Sunday, September 15, 1867, and at three o'clock the procession of dignitaries finally began. An orchestra of fifty and a choir of three hundred provided just the right air of festivity and solemnity, and the elaborate robes of the Roman Catholic clergy shone brightly in the sun. Leading the way were at least one hundred priests—so many, the paper said, that there were some "whose names we did not learn"—from all over New England and as far afield as Kentucky. They were followed by seven bishops in their high, pointed miters. The center of attention was the tall, spare figure of John Joseph Williams, who had been the bishop of Boston's Catholics for only a year and a half. He and the others had come to lay the cornerstone of a massive new cathedral church, which was going up at the corner of Washington and Malden Streets.¹

The place looked as all construction sites do in their early stages: mounds of dirt, wooden planking over treacherous pits, piles of stone and workers' tools, an irregular and incomplete foundation settling into the soggy ground. It took imagination to see the huge building that would rise on the spot, but Williams had that vision and asked others to see it too. He went first to the place where the church's main altar would be, sprinkling the ground with holy water and praying over the spot. Then he walked the sixty yards down what would eventually be the main aisle to lay the cornerstone. With a hammer and chisel he cut three

rough crosses into the block of Roxbury puddingstone and then “assisted” the workmen in sliding it into place: they did the real work, of course, while he rested a hand on it, just as a head of state does when laying a wreath at a battle monument. His colleague John McCloskey, the archbishop of New York, mounted a temporary pulpit and delivered a forty-five-minute address, marking the historical progress of the Catholic Church in the former home of the Puritans and looking forward to future harmony among all religious and social groups in the city. Williams closed the ceremony with a benediction, and the official guests adjourned to the main assembly hall of Boston College, a few blocks away, for “a sumptuous dinner.” It would be more than eight years before the Cathedral of the Holy Cross was finished and dedicated, but the optimism of that “lovely” fall day sustained those who had undertaken the work.²

In common parlance, a cathedral is merely a big church, but there is a more precise meaning. It is in a particular way a bishop's church, deriving its name from the chair or throne (*cathedra*, in Latin) from which the bishop presides on all important liturgical occasions. Given this identification with the leader of the local Catholic community, a cathedral is in some senses the first church of a diocese. It is also a parish church like any other, however, where those who live nearby go to hear Sunday mass, to receive the sacraments, to be married and buried, and, often, to send their children to school. Holy Cross Cathedral has always played a special role in its neighborhood of the South End, one of the most complex and historically interesting districts of the city. For the first two centuries of Boston's life, much of the area (including part of the cathedral's own property) was under water at high tide, with Washington Street marking the narrow “neck” that connected the Shawmut Peninsula of downtown with the mainland at Roxbury. Geography aside, the cathedral parish was also a crossroads for larger ethnic and social forces. The cathedral thus presents an ideal locale for charting the social history of Boston in the fifteen years after the end of the Civil War. It opens a window on the shifting fortunes of the South End itself and those of the rest of the city. More importantly, the parish encapsulated the changing social position of Catholic immigrants as they were becoming increasingly influential in Yankee Boston. The history of the cathedral parish in these years also offers an unexpected case study of racial dynamics in Reconstruction America, for it was a parish of working-class Irish immigrants presided over by an African American pastor.

The cathedral's experience may thus prompt historians to reconsider some of what they think they know about that turbulent era.

BOSTON'S CATHEDRAL had had a peripatetic early life before settling finally in the South End. The earliest congregation of Catholics in town had organized itself in 1789, purchasing an abandoned French Huguenot church on School Street, just down from King's Chapel, in which to conduct services. Led by Fathers John Cheverus and Francis Matignon, two émigré priests fleeing the French Revolution, the congregation quickly outgrew this space, so they commissioned the foremost architect and builder of the day, Charles Bulfinch, to design a new church. Drawing on contributions from the community at large—John Adams led the list with a donation of \$100—Bulfinch's new Holy Cross Church, on Franklin Street, was dedicated in the fall of 1803. When Boston was made a diocese five years later, with Cheverus as its first bishop, the handsome Federal structure, looking perhaps more like a Congregational meeting house than a Roman Catholic church, was designated his cathedral. With time, however, it fell victim to success. By the 1850s the Catholic population of Boston had grown so large that, even with the addition of parish churches in other neighborhoods, the cathedral was too small to accommodate the many demands on it. Moreover, the surrounding district was changing dramatically; as residences were steadily replaced by stores and offices, the parishioners were moving elsewhere. Accordingly, the old cathedral was closed: mass was said in it for the last time in September 1860, and the property was sold.³ A sky-scraping bank sits on the spot today.

Local church leaders looked to the South End as the site for their new cathedral, a structure that would be, as one of them said, "grand enough to meet our wants and to satisfy our aspirations."⁴ It was, on the eve of the Civil War, a not unlikely choice. Several decades of intense urban development, especially through reclamation of land from the harbor, had remade Boston's geography and reoriented the city away from the crowded lanes of the old colonial town. The South End seemed ready to become the next great neighborhood of the city, with new streets and residential squares laid out to attract the prosperous. Placing the cathedral there seemed to guarantee that Catholics would occupy a central position in the mental spaces of the city. Church leaders bought a block of houses and stores opposite Union Park and began to plan for the new Holy Cross. The start of construction was understandably delayed by

the war, with the congregation gathering in the meantime first in a rented theater and then in a former Unitarian church close to the new site. Patrick C. Keely of Brooklyn, a prolific builder of Catholic churches around the country, was commissioned to draw the plans and to supervise the project once ground was broken in April 1866. Thereafter, the work proceeded without interruption, but the forces of urban change were already leaving the area behind. Development of the Back Bay was now proceeding apace, and major cultural institutions—the art museum, the science museum, the new Massachusetts Institute of Technology—were locating there. The popularity of the South End faded quickly in spite of its proximity to downtown. By the time the cathedral was finished and dedicated in December 1875, the area had lost its cachet, the result of what an observer coolly labeled a “lack of sympathy and interest.” A fictional character eventually summed up the problem best. The father of that redoubtable Yankee George Apley, created years later by the novelist John P. Marquand, knew instinctively that it was time to move his family out of the South End when he observed a neighbor venturing out into the street in his shirtsleeves: a district where shocking things of that sort might happen was plainly no place for a gentleman.⁵

As a consequence, the new Holy Cross Cathedral was left to identify with and to meet the needs of the people who were more nearly its own: the Catholic immigrants and their families who lived in the South End. No formal parish census was taken during this period, so we cannot know precisely who the parishioners were. Even the parish boundary lines were somewhat indistinct, for Bishop Williams tended toward informality in such mundane administrative matters: he specified the line separating the cathedral from the territory of the next parish over, for example, as running “from the Broadway Bridge through the Ave. to the Boston and Albany R.R.”⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to describe the general characteristics of the cathedral parish and to learn something about the people who lived there. The territory comprised most of what were, according to the redrawn city lines of 1865, Wards 7 and 10. The upper reaches of the parish thus included the area around the Fort Point Channel that had been laid out with geographic street names drawn from upstate New York: Oneida, Oswego, Genesee, and Rochester. The parish’s true core was along the Washington Street corridor as far down as Franklin Square, extending to the harbor in one direction and to Boylston Street in the Back Bay in the other. It thus encompassed the streets whose names recalled more proximate places: Dover, Waltham,

Malden, Dedham, and Canton. Oral tradition said that the lines had been juggled somehow to include the State House and half of Beacon Hill, but one would be hard-pressed either to document that or to visualize on a map how it was possible. Instead, the heart of the parish was always the South End.⁷

A detailed social profile of the whole city, compiled in 1880 by the state's fledgling Bureau of Labor Statistics, permits some generalizations about living conditions in the parish. The two wards had a combined population of about 25,000 people, roughly 7 percent of the city's total. The density of the area, however, could make the population seem larger. There were almost twelve persons living in each dwelling unit in Ward 7 (the citywide average was barely eight), and more than ten per dwelling in Ward 10, ranking the two wards respectively second and sixth among the twenty-five wards in the city. Average family size in Ward 10 was 6.6 people, the highest anywhere in Boston; in Ward 7, it was 5.3, the fourth highest in the city, where the average in all wards was only 4.9. The people crowded together in the parish were also overwhelmingly white. By this time, informal patterns of residential segregation were firmly established in what had been the capital of abolition, and African Americans were confined to such districts as the crowded north slope of Beacon Hill: blacks accounted for only 0.6 and 2.9 percent of the people of Wards 7 and 10, respectively. Instead, a significant number of residents of the South End were either white immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, and the majority of these were Irish. In Ward 7, the northern end of the parish, 42.8 percent of the residents had been born abroad and an astonishing 56 percent of them were people both of whose parents had been born in Ireland. Ward 10 presented not quite so clear a picture, but the immigrant presence was still a real one: 29.9 percent of its residents had come to the United States from somewhere else and "only" 25.9 percent of them came from parents who had both been born in Ireland. Finally, the people who lived near the cathedral were young. Almost exactly half (49.8 percent) the residents of Ward 7 were under twenty-five years of age, and more than one-fifth of them (21.2 percent) were younger than ten; in Ward 10, about 40 percent were younger than twenty-five, while 9 percent were less than ten.⁸ The cathedral parish was thus a place where white newcomers to Boston and those who had not been there for very long could try to make a start at a new home for themselves and their families.

That required employment, and residents of the South End were gen-

erally able to find steady jobs, most of them at or below the middle of the scale of wages and skills. Despite the usual ups and downs (including a serious but short-lived national economic panic in 1873), Boston's economy was generally healthy after the Civil War. Improvements in rail and maritime facilities meant that the volume of trade passing through the city was expanding at an impressive rate. The value of imports through the port of Boston had grown about sevenfold in the fifty years before 1880, state officials happily calculated, and exports had expanded by more than 400 percent in the same period. Not all parts of town benefited equally from this boom, however, and the South End often lagged behind other areas. The neighborhood was "as distinctly lacking in economic individuality as it is in any sort of local *esprit de corps*," an observer would note a few years later. "The chief industries are those associated with the coal slips and lumber yards on the water front, and with the factories which depend on their supplies." Workers on the docks of the harbor or in the railyards of South Station could walk to work from the streets of the cathedral parish, and residence there thus had practical advantages. The major stores of Boston were elsewhere in town, while those of the South End were mostly small operations dependent on local trade—"installment stores, which sell furniture or clothing on credit," an early sociologist said, barely concealing his disdain.⁹

Locating the parishioners of Holy Cross Cathedral in this general picture of their neighborhood is possible by examining a sample of the people who were married there in the decade and a half after the Civil War. Catholic marriage registers of the period generally recorded only the names of the bride and groom and those of the two official witnesses, but the priests of the cathedral parish sometimes added the street addresses; thus it is possible to identify the parties and to find them, listed by residence and occupation, in the annual city directory. The number of marriages in the parish went steadily upward as time went on, rising from just over one hundred in 1865 to more than three hundred in 1873, leveling off thereafter at about two hundred and fifty every year. These high numbers were perhaps normal in a parish with so many young people, and priests of the cathedral were called upon steadily to preside at nuptial ceremonies. Catholic practice discouraged but did not actually forbid marriage during the penitential church seasons of Lent (in the early spring) and Advent (just before Christmas), but the other times of the year were busy ones for weddings. Even so, there was a good deal of unpredictability. American Catholic priests struggled throughout the

nineteenth century to encourage couples intending to marry to visit the rectory at least once for spiritual counseling beforehand, but they achieved only limited success. The relentlessly chronological marriage registers of the cathedral testify to the apparent impunity with which a couple might simply ring the rectory doorbell and ask whatever priest was available at the moment to perform the necessary ceremony on the spot.¹⁰

Among those marrying at the cathedral, unskilled workers predominated. Fully 40.9 percent of the men were identified simply as laborers or working in other jobs, such as porters or hostlers, that required brute strength more than anything else. A significant number (33.9 percent), however, had special and marketable skills, and the range of their talents was a broad one. Often these workers were connected to the building trades, with noticeable numbers of carpenters, stonemasons, and cabinetmakers. Others were employed in light industry as general machinists or boilermakers, and still others in various occupations connected to a transportation system that was still largely dependent on the horse (blacksmiths, wheelwrights, harnessmakers, for instance). These characteristics all situated the cathedral's parishioners squarely in the working class, with only a few of them rising higher. About 11 percent can be classified as entrepreneurs or white-collar workers: there were, for example, clerks, tailors, and grocers among them. Others were beginning to take advantage of the civil service to find better job security and higher pay: the occasional policeman and civil servant (an inspector at the customs house was married in 1869) were beginning to appear among the cathedral's grooms. No single parish can be said to be entirely "typical," of course, but Holy Cross Cathedral looks much as we have come to expect late-nineteenth-century parishes in urban immigrant neighborhoods to look. Parishioners were managing to get by, working at unglamorous and often physically taxing jobs, but hopeful that they or their children might be able to achieve more; a few of them were already doing so. Even though occupational slippage was "not infrequent," an early scholar of social mobility in the South End concluded, Irish immigrants were "on the whole rising in the social scale, the second generation making a better showing than the preceding one."¹¹ A study of the parish over a longer period of time would confirm or refute that conclusion for later years, but for now we can say that the cathedral was home to those who were beginning to think that the promise of America would prove to be within reach.

The cathedral marriage records also tell us something about group cohesion and the maintenance of Catholic self-identity in the parish. Priests and laypeople alike usually assumed that young men and women preparing to marry would choose "one of their own" as a future spouse. Probably as many non-Catholic clergy and families did the same thing in reverse, but the Catholic Church had institutionalized means for signaling that marrying outside the faith was a serious and potentially dangerous step. Priests actively discouraged their parishioners from marrying non-Catholics, though they could not expressly prevent them from doing so. Still, they exercised subtle but persistent forms of social pressure to reinforce the notion that "mixed marriages" should remain exceptions to a more consistent rule, best avoided if at all possible. When one of the parties to a marriage was not a Catholic, for example, the wedding ceremony could not take place in the church itself; rather, it was conducted in private, usually in the rectory parlor, with only the legal minimum of two witnesses present. Moreover, the non-Catholic party had to defer to the Catholic's religion by signing a pledge that the priest wrote out in the marriage register: "I [name], about to marry [name], do solemnly promise that I will not interfere with [him/her] in the free exercise of [his/her] religion, and that if God should bless our union with children, they shall be brought up in the Catholic faith."¹² Sometimes, to reinforce the point, the priest asked non-Catholics to write the pledge out themselves in their own hands and then to sign it in front of the witnesses to the marriage.

We cannot know how many wedding plans foundered on these rocks, but the cathedral's marriage records show that such discouragement combined with other cultural factors in keeping the number of interfaith marriages low during this period. Of the nearly 3,700 marriages performed at the cathedral between 1865 and 1880, only 245 (6.6 percent) of them united Catholics and non-Catholics. The number might fluctuate from year to year, but it remained low, never even approaching one in ten. Moreover, the vast majority of these mixed marriages involved a Catholic woman and a non-Catholic man: in only 28 (11.4 percent) of the 245 cases was the bride not a Catholic while her husband-to-be was. This imbalance is not surprising. The church's principal concern in these situations was that the next generation of children might be lost to the faith. Since women were presumed to be the ones who would take the major responsibility for the religious and moral education of children, a family in which the mother was not a Catholic was more dangerous on

this score than one in which the father was not. The means for dissuading young Catholic men from marrying outside the fold were, apparently, very effective. That the cathedral was not unique in this is clear from sampling other local parishes at the time, which typically exhibited intermarriage rates at 2 percent or below, likewise predominantly Catholic brides and non-Catholic grooms. Nor was Boston different from other cities: parishes in Detroit, for example, were then consistently reporting intermarriage rates of about 5 percent.¹³ The parishioners of Holy Cross Cathedral had a strong sense of themselves as a group. The parish was a little world of its own, in which one would expect to find one's friends and one's husband or wife.

The sacramental records of the cathedral also demonstrate that it was a very active place. There was not yet a grammar or high school—Williams did not share the enthusiasm of some other American bishops for church-sponsored schools, and the cathedral would not have them until the twentieth century—but the five priests of the parish found more than enough to do in meeting the basic devotional needs of their people. At least partially as a defensive response, the clergy tried to regularize parish activity as much as they could, and their efforts at scheduling centered on the Sabbath. Sunday was a day not just for morning mass and (often considered equally important) a service of vespers and benediction in the evening; it also became the day for other religious ceremonies as well. This made sense for a working-class population, who often could count on only this one day off from work. Baptisms, for example, were usually scheduled for Sunday afternoons, and the cathedral's baptismal records show that more children were indeed baptized on Sundays than on the other days of the week. The Catholic theology of the time, however, meant that some baptisms might not be able to wait until the next available Sunday. A baby who died without having been baptized was believed to be unable to achieve heaven; thus, if a newborn were sickly or not expected to live, the godparents rushed the infant to church to be baptized, frequently without the father and almost always without the mother being present. Baptisms recorded on the same day as birth were not at all uncommon. Whenever possible, marriages too were generally scheduled for Sunday afternoons. It was still far from the universal practice to have a complete mass celebrated as part of the marriage ceremony, even when both of the parties to the marriage were Catholics; no mass was offered if one of the principals was not a Catholic. Either way, short wedding services could also be conducted

within a few minutes on Sunday afternoons. Parishioners did not always cooperate in keeping to this routine, however, expecting their priests to make themselves available for these sacraments at virtually any time and on any day of the week, regardless of the usual schedule. During one week in May 1870, for example, there were four baptisms and two marriages at the cathedral on Sunday afternoon but even more sacramental activity on the other days of the week: at least one baptism every day—there were three on Tuesday—and four additional marriages, including two on Thursday.¹⁴

Measured by the sacramental activity of its priests, the cathedral was among the busiest Catholic parishes in the city. It was one of the four largest parishes in Boston, approached in size only by St. James's church (a few blocks closer to downtown, near South Station), St. Mary's in the dense North End, and St. Joseph's in the West End, along the curve of the Charles River at the foot of Beacon Hill. These four were the Catholic anchors of Boston, even as the total number of parishes grew and the Catholic population expanded into some of the leafier "streetcar suburbs" (such as Roxbury and Dorchester), which were gradually incorporated into the city beginning in 1867. In more ways than one, the cathedral stood out as a first among equals. In the fifteen years following the end of the war, the number of baptisms there always ranked it either first or second among the big four churches. There might be as few as 486 baptisms (in 1880) or as many as 636 (in 1870), but there was on average more than one for every single day of the year. St. James's and St. Mary's usually alternated for second place, sometimes getting close to the cathedral's total (in 1870, there were 606 baptisms at St. Mary's, just thirty short of the cathedral) but often lagging farther behind (St. James's had only 394 that year). Much the same thing was true with marriages: their number reached a high point at the cathedral in 1873 at 309, while the number at the other three parishes rarely broke 200.¹⁵ Anyone who thought that the parish clergy lived an easy life of quiet prayer and contemplation was mistaken.

The priests at the cathedral in this period were noteworthy, however, for more than just the volume of business they were called upon to do. The parish might look merely like an especially good example of a fairly recognizable type, but it attracts the historian's special attention because it was also the stage on which an unusual drama of race and ethnicity was played out every day, with a surprising absence of difficulty or rancor. If the white, immigrant, working-class parishioners are expected, we are

less prepared to meet their rector. Alexander Sherwood Healy, who served in this office (essentially that of pastor of the parish who, because this was the cathedral, was entitled to the honorific designation of rector) from 1870 to 1875, was a member of a remarkable family. His father had been an Irish immigrant to Georgia in the 1820s and had built a prosperous cotton plantation on the labor of fifty slaves. The priest's mother had been one of those slaves, a woman who was never treated as such but rather as the planter's common-law wife. Neither one of them had ever married anyone else and, though their union could never be sanctioned by law, they did their best to establish a normal family life in rural antebellum Georgia. The children, defined legally as slaves because of their mother's servitude, were all sent to Massachusetts to be educated, beginning in the 1840s, and several of the eight surviving siblings became Catholic priests and nuns, successfully avoiding the disadvantage and worse that was the common lot of black and mixed-race Americans in the years on either side of the Civil War.¹⁶ How Father Healy in particular emerged as the unlikely leader of the cathedral parish challenges some of our usual expectations about American race relations in the aftermath of the Civil War.

SHERWOOD HEALY WAS BORN IN 1836, the fourth child in the family. Together with his older brothers, he was enrolled in the newly opened Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1854. Following two of his brothers, he quickly decided on a career in the priesthood, left the college before graduation, and was sent by John Fitzpatrick, Williams's predecessor as Boston's bishop, to Montreal for seminary studies. This was a normal route for a young man pursuing his vocation as a priest, but it was especially necessary for Healy. There were few seminaries in the United States at the time, and most of them were in Southern or border states, where his family background would have constituted a serious social impediment. He showed exceptional intellectual promise at Montreal, however, and so he was soon sent on to larger and more distinguished seminaries in Rome and in Paris, where he was ordained in 1858 amid the splendor of Notre Dame. That was not a very good year for any African American to contemplate returning to the United States, whether as a priest or not, and both Healy and his superiors recognized the problem. "He feels an unwillingness," Fitzpatrick told an official in Rome, "for reasons which I cannot condemn, to return to this country." Instead, he was considered for a position at a seminary in Rome that

had just been founded for the purpose of educating American priests close to the administrative center of the papacy. But even that was problematic. Better educated than most contemporary priests, Healy was "admirably qualified" for the job, Fitzpatrick said to another American bishop, but there was a "stubborn" reason that stood in his way. "He has African blood," Fitzpatrick concluded, "and it shews [*sic*] distinctly in his exterior."¹⁷

Fitzpatrick was right: Healy's ancestry did indeed "shew." Most of his siblings had very light complexions; indeed, they successfully "passed" throughout their lives and were generally not known to have any African American lineage. Sherwood, however, could not do that. He had the physical characteristics that white Americans associated with blacks—the tightly coiled hair, the nose and lips that were all too often caricatured on the minstrel stage, and a skin that passport agents described unambiguously as "dark." These features "might lessen the respect [others] ought to have" for this young priest, Fitzpatrick knew, and so he decided to bring Healy back to Boston, where his own authority as bishop might protect the young man. At first Sherwood was assigned to serve as chaplain at a large Catholic orphanage in the city, a task for which he was vastly overqualified, but soon he was helping out at the cathedral parish and even taking a hand in diocesan administration. More than likely, he was at first an unusual sight when saying mass—there were no other black Catholic priests in the country—but he quickly came to seem entirely normal. He could preach a "splendid" sermon, a fellow priest noted, and his pleasant singing voice made him a popular choice to preside at chanted High Masses in a time when, as he himself noted, most priests were "wretched singers." For a few years during and after the Civil War, he was delegated to teach theology at a seminary in Troy, New York, but Boston always remained his real home. When John Williams succeeded to the position of bishop on Fitzpatrick's death in February 1866, Healy returned to Boston and became his right-hand man. It was thus hardly surprising when Healy was designated rector of the cathedral after the position came open on the transfer of another priest in the fall of 1870.¹⁸ The appointment made Sherwood Healy one of the most visible Catholic priests in Boston. The reluctance to place him in a prominent position because his features showed so "distinctly" had vanished; neither he nor Williams nor the Catholics of the city stopped any longer to think that he, visibly a "black man," was

at all anomalous. His five years as rector confirmed how unremarkable this remarkable priest had come to be.

As rector, he participated in most of the usual routines of the parish, even as he supervised the work of the other priests and managed the finances of the place. First and foremost, he took his turn at saying mass every day (usually for a small number of attendees), and he joined the regular rotation of priests on Sundays, when masses were more crowded and were scheduled every hour on the hour, beginning at six o'clock in the morning. Like his fellow priests, he prepared a sermon for delivery each week, sometimes writing them out in complete sentences, sometimes relying on detailed outlines. These were short affairs in comparison to the longer preaching efforts of American Protestant clergy, seldom running more than fifteen minutes. Many of Healy's sermons survive, and they seem in retrospect unexceptional for their era. They touch on doctrinal points, devotion to the saints, the various festivals of the church year, and such practical human and social problems as the difficulties of combating drunkenness. He had obviously learned a classical rhetorical style, usually constructing his sermons around three main points, which he first stated succinctly, then explained more fully, and finally restated.

In addition to these spiritual responsibilities, he was also the chief financial officer of the parish. As such, he had to oversee both the collection of the offerings of his people—still done largely through the annual rental of pews rather than the later practice of "passing the basket"—and the payment of all the bills. There are no surviving account books from the cathedral parish in these years, but those of other churches show that a pastor was much like a small businessman: contemporary accounts from nearby St. James's parish, for example, show annual income and expenses of more than \$17,000 per year, an impressive sum then, with outlays for coal, repairs, and the salaries of such parish employees as the sexton and the organist. These administrative demands meant that Healy, like other pastors elsewhere, generally exempted himself from presiding at the baptisms and marriages of his parishioners, generally leaving these tasks to his junior curates. The sacramental registers of the cathedral show that Father Healy conformed to this pattern: during his tenure, he never performed more than 6 percent of either of these ceremonies, a figure which should not be overinterpreted. His parishioners were not avoiding him because of his race; if anything, he was avoiding them, simply because he had too many other things to do.¹⁹

Surely the most important of those was the construction of the new cathedral building. Work on the project was already well underway by the time he got to the parish, but its successful completion became his principal task. The plan for the building was drawn along impressive lines, and the grand scale was deliberate. Anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiments were still a very recent memory in Boston, and construction of the cathedral could signal both the end of one era and the dawning of a new one. Some bricks from the ruins of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, destroyed by a nativist riot in 1834, were included in the arch over the front door, but the scale of the structure would speak more loudly of the permanence and success of the Roman Church in spite of opposition. The cathedral had a floor plan of almost 50,000 square feet, and the rose window above the entrance would be flanked by two square towers, each of them to be topped by a soaring spire. When complete, Healy liked to point out, the spires would become, "with the exception of the gilded dome of the State House, the most prominent object of view . . . for miles around." In the end, the spires were never built, but the cathedral was nonetheless a building that would satisfy the "aspirations" of its people, letting Yankee Boston know that Catholics were here to stay. More than once, Healy reminded his parishioners that the taller of the two towers was, at three hundred feet, a full eighty feet higher than the Bunker Hill Monument.²⁰

Day-to-day supervision of the construction crews fell largely to Patrick Keely, the architect, but Sherwood Healy moved among them too, even as he turned his attention to the task of ensuring a regular flow of cash to underwrite it all. The financing of American Catholic parishes had long rested on securing a large number of small contributions (rather than the other way around), and that would prove a successful approach here. Early pledges from prominent citizens, both Catholic and non-Catholic, had gotten the effort started, but Healy sought to broaden the base of support. One of his first actions was to form a Church Debt Society, which parishioners could join by donating fifty cents every month: "Who is there," Healy asked his people, "that cannot contribute to the new Cathedral fifty cents a month?" In addition to the social benefits of joining (such as meetings and dinners), there were spiritual benefits too, including a special mass every week for contributors and for the repose of the souls of deceased members. More ambitious were two fundraising fairs, the first of which was held nightly over several weeks in the fall of 1871. Set in the half-completed shell of the building itself,

the fair featured tables sponsored by parishes and local religious societies at which those in attendance could buy religious books and statues, take a chance on pianos and other items offered at raffle, and sample offerings of food and flowers. The cathedral's own "rector's table," sponsored by Father Healy and staffed by parishioners, proved very popular, bringing in more than \$6,300 over the length of the fair, more than any other single attraction. There were concerts by parish choirs, dramatic readings from amateur orators, and several biblical "tableaux," all of them, a newspaper reported, "executed in a manner that bespoke taste, ability, and refinement." Visitors paid twenty-five cents to get in, and more than 6,000 showed up on the first night, with steady attendance thereafter until the fair closed in December. By then, it had taken in an astounding \$90,000. "The Catholics of Boston have reason to congratulate themselves on the great success of the fair in every sense," Healy said afterwards; "the general public deserves our thanks for the liberal and generous spirit with which the fair was patronized."²¹ An equally successful fair was held in 1874, providing a final push for completion of the project, which eventually cost almost a million and a half dollars altogether.

The ease with which Sherwood Healy moved among his parishioners and the other citizens of Boston at these fairs is a measure of how little the fact of his race had come to matter. A decade before, his skin and the features that showed so "distinctly" had disqualified him from service at a Roman seminary, but now, only six years after the end of the Civil War, he stepped into the public role of leader of his parish without any apparent disadvantage. As recently as 1862, the newspaper of the Boston Irish, the *Pilot*, had written casually of the "natural inferiority" of African Americans, asserting that "the negro race is happier in slavery than in freedom," as if those were propositions no one could dispute. Even now, barely a decade later, newspapers north and south were beginning to fill up with lurid tales of black abuses in the Reconstruction governments of the old Confederacy, all seeming to demonstrate that blacks were incapable of performing the public duties that belonged properly only to whites. And yet Sherwood Healy could direct the efforts of his white parishioners without anyone ever commenting on the apparent anomalies of that circumstance. The *Boston Herald*, the newspaper of the city's solid middle-class businessmen, praised "Rev. Father Healey [*sic*]" for the success of the cathedral fair: the paper might misspell his name, but it found nothing else that was newsworthy about him.²² In no public

report on Healy—and he appeared in the newspapers regularly if not frequently throughout his tenure—was the matter of his race ever mentioned. He was, it would seem, just another Catholic priest with an Irish name.

Historians are usually in the position of trying to explain what happened in the past. Here the problem is trickier, for it is a matter of trying to explain what didn't happen. It took a very deliberate act of not seeing for his own parishioners to overlook his racial identity, but they repeated that act over and over. Whenever Healy appeared before them in the uniform of his calling, the elaborate robes of the liturgy, he clearly stood apart from them; he even spoke a language, Latin, that few of them understood but that they associated with the ultimate concerns of salvation. In their eyes, he had been transformed from a black man into a Catholic priest, and they now related to him in a way that they almost certainly would not have otherwise. In confession they told him the most personal details of their lives, accepting his correction and advice in return; whites did not usually take admonition from blacks without retaliation. They received communion from his hands, allowing him to place the eucharistic wafer in their own mouths; all physical contact, let alone one so intimate, between white and black Americans was otherwise proscribed. They gave him their hard-earned money to spend as he saw fit, at a time when many of them otherwise presumed that blacks were incapable of the responsible management of worldly affairs. His commitment to his parishioners evoked a sincere return commitment from them. Historians have generally taken for granted that there was bitter and unrelenting hostility between Irish Americans and African Americans in Boston and other Northern cities throughout the nineteenth century. Sherwood Healy's experience in the Holy Cross Cathedral parish demonstrates that other reactions were at least possible.

The question of why the larger, non-Catholic community accepted Healy with such equanimity is even more intriguing. In a setting in which Catholics were still viewed warily as hopelessly poor and hopelessly foreign, why didn't his status as a priest merely compound his difficulties? Didn't the native-born white community have two reasons to be suspicious of him, race and religion, instead of just one? Here, too, he was able to slip the traps that were everywhere in race relations during his lifetime, and his success in this rested on two grounds. First, he carefully avoided all contact with the local black community. This was easy enough for him to do. Most of Boston's African Americans

attended various Protestant churches of their own, and it was unlikely that he, a Catholic priest, would have any association with them in an age when the barriers to overt interdenominational cooperation were high, as the requirement that non-Catholic spouses defer to their Catholic partners attests. Second, his standing as the leader of a church whose members were overwhelmingly white themselves may have effectively made him white too. He readily passed an important test on this score during the cathedral fair of 1871. Barely two weeks after the newspapers had praised him for the success of the fair, they carried another story about a very different local clergyman. The Reverend Alexander Ellis, identified as pastor of "the Joy Street Colored Church," on Beacon Hill, was bodily removed from the whites-only cabin of a ferry traveling out of Boston to Provincetown.²³ Sherwood Healy had never suffered this kind of indignity. The black pastor of a black church could not escape the scrutiny or the censure of whites, but the black pastor of a white church apparently could; indeed, he could in effect become white himself, no matter what he looked like.

He was still a young man, just thirty-nine years old as the cathedral neared completion in the spring of 1875, and his success in the one parish demonstrated that he had talents that might be applied elsewhere. Accordingly, Williams transferred Healy to the position of pastor of St. James's parish in the city, which was itself in the midst of erecting a substantial new church building. This might have been a step toward even higher positions in the church, maybe even that of bishop. Such a future would not come for him, however, for just then his always precarious health began to give out. In August of that year he had several frightening episodes of bleeding in the lungs, and he was soon confined to the hospital. On the morning of October 21 he died, "exceedingly well prepared for death," the resigned Williams said. The funeral two days later was "among the most impressive that have ever taken place in Boston," with more than 150 priests and bishops from around New England in attendance, the body taken afterwards for burial in the chapel at St. Augustine's cemetery in South Boston, the oldest Catholic burying ground in the city. Not even in death was his unusual situation noted; nowhere was his racial status or his family background mentioned. He was "a man of much ability," the *Boston Globe* said, "greatly respected by all who knew him." He had been entirely "identified with the Catholic Church," the paper concluded, perhaps not even realizing the import of what it was saying.²⁴

If large historical trends may sometimes be seen in small, seemingly mundane examples, the case of Boston's Cathedral of the Holy Cross in the years after the end of the Civil War is a telling one. On the surface, little about the parish seems noteworthy. As we reconstruct this community nearly a century and a half later, its people seem so like those in countless other Catholic parishes across urban America. Rooted in the working class, they built lives and religious and social institutions to meet their needs. But historians should not be too quick to characterize them, for they might, in perfectly ordinary ways, be capable of extraordinary things. Living in a world in which anything that touched on race was highly contested territory, they might transcend all expectations about them. Rather than overt hostility, they might be capable of acceptance and even warmth toward an African American in their midst. To be sure, the case of Sherwood Healy was not the normal one, and it probably did not represent his people's willingness to abandon American racial arrangements altogether: the very fact that he was a single exception and not a rule may have made him easier to accept. How they would have reacted to an influx of blacks as fellow parishioners, for example, is another matter, one about which we can only speculate. But these Irish American parishioners were still capable, with little fanfare, of engaging in an ongoing subversion of the unwritten rules of race in postbellum American society. In that, these "common" people seem very uncommon indeed.

Notes

1. *Pilot* (Boston), September, 21, 1867.
2. *Pilot*, September 21 and 28, 1867. The dedication ceremony is described in the *Pilot*, December 18, 1875.
3. For the early history of the building, see Thomas H. O'Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 13–26. Since 1860, many have lamented the loss of the Franklin Street cathedral. Nothing could be more appropriate for Boston, they insist, than a cathedral designed by Bulfinch. Unfortunately, had the structure not been torn down in 1860, it would have burned down in the great fire that devastated the area in 1872. Contemporaries may get an idea of what it looked like, however, by visiting St. Stephen's church on Hanover Street in the North End, a near-duplicate of the old cathedral.

4. Undated address ("Gentlemen") in A. Sherwood Healy Papers, box 1, Archives, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass. (hereafter ACHC).

5. John P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937). For a contemporary assessment of the changing fortunes of the South End, see Robert A. Woods, ed., *The City Wilderness: A Settlement Study* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1898); the quotation is at page 6. For a historical description, see Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 56-60.

6. Williams Parish Boundary Notebook, 1871, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston (hereafter AABo).

7. Following the shifting ward boundary lines of the city in the nineteenth century is a tremendously complicated task. The changes that went into effect at the end of the Civil War are described with unusual clarity in the "Second Report of the Committee on the New Division of the City into Wards, October 19, 1865," City Document No. 81, *Boston City Documents* (Boston, 1866), City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass. Ward boundaries had to be redrawn again shortly after this, as Roxbury, Charlestown, and other formerly distinct towns were incorporated into the city.

8. Carroll D. Wright, *The Social, Commercial, and Manufacturing Statistics of the City of Boston* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1882), is useful in describing the city in these years. For the foregoing, see the charts on pages 14 (family size and persons per dwelling); 15 (race); 16 (foreign birth); 34-35 (nativity of parents); 56-57 and 62-63 (age).

9. Woods, *City Wilderness*, 82-83 and 84; Wright, *Social Statistics of Boston*, 185. On the general prosperity of the city during the war and afterward, see Thomas H. O'Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 204-9, and Jack Tager, "Massachusetts and the Age of Economic Revolution," in *Massachusetts in the Gilded Age: Selected Essays*, ed. Jack Tager and John W. Ifkovic (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 3-28.

10. The marriage registers of the cathedral parish for these years are now in AABo. This sample of 276 marriages (10.9 percent of the total) was assembled by taking the names of the parties to the marriage recorded at the top of each page; since the marriages were simply noted in the books one after another as they occurred, this method assures random selection. The names of the parties were then searched in the city directories, with unexpected success. A surprisingly large number (59.7 percent) of the grooms in the sample were identified, using their street address to distinguish similar names. Since women were rarely listed in the city directories at this time, however, it was impossible to identify a large enough number of them from which to generalize. These results suggest that earlier assertions about the impossibility of conducting this kind of analysis for immigrants—supposedly because their "names lacked uniqueness"—need to be reconsidered; see Peter R. Knights, *Yankee Destinies: The Lives of Ordinary*

Nineteenth-Century Bostonians (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 2. On the unpredictability of life and work for the clergy in this period, see Robert E. Sullivan, "Beneficial Relations: Toward a Social History of the Diocesan Priests of Boston, 1875-1944," in *Catholic Boston: Studies in Religion and Community, 1870-1970*, ed. Robert E. Sullivan and James M. O'Toole (Boston: Archdiocese of Boston, 1985), 201-38.

11. Woods, *City Wilderness*, 39.

12. The formula appears repeatedly in the parish marriage records in AABo.

13. Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Marriage Registers, 1865-1880, RG IV.B.002, AABo. For comparative purposes, I have examined a sample of several other large parishes in Boston at this time: St. James, St. Mary (North End), and St. Joseph (West End). For the experience in Detroit, see Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 99-101.

14. See the cathedral baptismal and marriage records for the week of May 15, 1870, AABo. The Sunday focus of religious practice in the nineteenth century is described in Thomas E. Wangler, "Catholic Religious Life in Boston in the Era of Cardinal O'Connell," in *Catholic Boston*, ed. Sullivan and O'Toole, esp. 239-42. Nuptial Masses were rare enough that priests noted specifically in the record when one had been offered.

15. In drawing these conclusions, I have compared the sacramental registers of these parishes, all of which are in AABo, at five-year intervals, 1865-1880.

16. On the Healy family generally, see James M. O'Toole, *Passing for White: Race, Religion, and the Healy Family, 1820-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), and Albert J. Foley, *Bishop Healy: Beloved Outcaste* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954).

17. Fitzpatrick to Bedini, July 5, 1859, Congressi: America Centrale 8:895, Archives, Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, Rome, Italy; Fitzpatrick to Hughes, July 10, 1859, Hughes Papers A-9, Archives, Archdiocese of New York, Yonkers, New York. On Fitzpatrick's role as mentor and protector of the Healy family, see O'Toole, *Passing for White*, chap. 4, and Thomas H. O'Connor, *Fitzpatrick's Boston, 1846-1866: John B. Fitzpatrick, Third Bishop of Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), esp. 155-56 and 228-30.

18. For the observations about Healy from a contemporary priest, including the favorable assessment of his preaching, see Hilary Tucker, Diary, March 27, 1864, and elsewhere, RG VII.11.1, AABo; for Healy's comments on the musical ability of his colleagues, see Healy to Williams, October 25, 1868, John Joseph Williams Papers, 2:31, AABo. A physical description is included as part of Healy's passport, 30071 (September 18, 1869), Department of State Passport Records, microfilm M-1371, roll 3, National Archives and Records Administration.

19. There are four boxes of Sherwood Healy's sermons among his papers in ACHC. For the financial accounts of St. James's and other parishes in this period, see the collection of Parish Annual Reports, RG III.A, AABo. The

percentage of baptisms and marriages he performed in the cathedral has been calculated from the cathedral sacramental registers in AABO; since the presiding priest at each such ceremony recorded the event in his own hand and then signed the record, each priest's level of activity is clear.

20. Healy wrote a brief history of the cathedral and the building project in a newspaper the parish published called "The Cathedral." Copies are rare, but there is one in AABO, together with a typescript; see also Healy's undated address ("Gentlemen") in the Healy Papers.

21. See the two items marked "Circular," dated January 15, 1871, and January 10, 1872, in the Cathedral Fair Scrapbook, RG IV.A.2, AABO. For a typical newspaper report of the proceedings, see the *Pilot*, November 25, 1871.

22. *Boston Herald*, November 13, 1871; the *Pilot's* assertion of blacks' inferiority and preference for slavery appeared on May 31, 1862.

23. Ellis's case is reported in *Boston Herald*, November 23, 1871. Clergymen and other prominent blacks were often singled out for particularly rigorous enforcement of Jim Crow laws: if they were allowed to get away with transgressions, the thinking went, the foundations of the laws would be seriously undermined. See James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 171, 204.

24. Episcopal Register, October 23, 1875, RG I.2, AABO; *Boston Globe*, October 22, 1875.

*Charles Sumner and the Political Cultures
of Reconstruction in Massachusetts*



DAVID QUIGLEY

*The State which gave him his great opportunity, clothing his words
with the majesty of Massachusetts, so that when he spoke it was
not the voice of a man, but of a Commonwealth . . .*

—GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS,

EULOGY FOR CHARLES SUMNER, JUNE 9, 1874

ONE OF THE TOWERING FIGURES in the history of nineteenth-century America, Charles Sumner stood at the center of many of the most important debates in the nation's public life from the 1840s to the 1870s. In the fields of law, diplomacy, and congressional politics, the Massachusetts Republican towered over the era of the American Civil War and Reconstruction. Contemporaries—whether allies or adversaries—recognized Sumner as a political intellectual with rare influence. At his death in 1874, countless commentators placed Sumner with Lincoln and Grant in that small circle of nineteenth-century public figures who measured up to the standard set by the founding fathers.

Today, however, Sumner sits awkwardly in the historiography. Even as recent scholarship has done much to advance our understandings of antebellum reform, postwar radicalism, and literary transcendentalism, Sumner's crucial role at the juncture of politics and culture is now overlooked in ways that would have struck nineteenth-century Americans as curious. Certainly, David Donald's authoritative two-volume biography, completed over thirty years ago, continues to cast a long shadow on subsequent studies of Sumner.¹ Anne-Marie Taylor's recent reassessment, focusing on the first four decades of Sumner's life, stands as one of the few studies that have taken Sumner seriously over the last two

decades. It is high time for a new generation to follow Taylor's lead and return Sumner to a central place in scholarship on New England and America in the Civil War era.²

As Taylor's recent biography, ending in 1851, suggests, what little recent work has been done on Sumner has tended to focus on the antebellum era. More than any single topic in Sumner's decades-long public career, Preston Brooks's 1856 caning of the senator has occupied recent scholars' attention. This essay focuses our attention, instead, on the postwar years. Alongside Sumner's work in the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., as spiritual leader of the radical Republicans, and as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, this study seeks to locate Sumner's position in the particular political cultures of Reconstruction-era Massachusetts.³

In placing Sumner squarely in the specific context of postbellum Massachusetts, it is necessary to overcome an image of Sumner as apart from and in some ways transcending the more mundane realm of local politics. It is worth noting that Sumner himself was perhaps the primary architect of just that image. The senator was already widely viewed as a man of abstraction and high idealism by the early 1850s. In the years after the Civil War, his colleague Carl Schurz asserted that Sumner "would have considered it a desecration of his high office to descend to any of the arts of the demagogue or the wirepuller, for the purpose of strengthening his personal following."⁴ Democrats and Southern whites would surely have argued with Schurz's characterization, but their criticism would have focused on national issues. To understand the power of Sumner's career in public life, we must come to terms with the ways in which he imagined and then practiced a different style of politics. In short, we misread Sumner to remove him from the political cultures of his time. His achievement was to reconcile the intellectual and the political in ways that few other Americans ever have.

Charles Sumner was centrally a politician, one who represented a particular place at a particular moment in time. Sumner's Massachusetts shaped the senator's public career and fueled his tireless campaigns for civil rights in the Reconstruction decade. In comparing Sumner to an extensive catalog of other eminent American intellectuals, David Donald correctly emphasizes that Sumner "alone was responsible to a constituency of voters."⁵ Nineteenth-century Massachusetts gave rise to the senator, and in the course of his long career Sumner's relationship with the Commonwealth was wildly erratic. Yet throughout, his public character

was substantially shaped by his constituents and by the explosive political culture of mid-nineteenth-century Massachusetts.

To the modern observer, Sumner stands as radically different, far removed from conventional understandings of an urban politician of the nineteenth century. His contemporary, "Boss" Tweed of Manhattan, represented the kind of machine politics that has come to dominate our view of the public life of urban America in the postbellum decade. Yet, a study of Sumner's speeches in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War underscores his self-identification as a product of a particular American city. Sumner regularly invoked his connection to his birth-place and his constituents. In an 1868 campaign address, Sumner seemed distracted from the pressing political issues of the day and more interested in elaborating on his beloved city. To his partisan audience, he went on at length about "my ward." Sumner's speech peaked with his description of "Beacon Hill, the highest point of Boston, where in early days were lighted the beacon fires which flashed over the country. The fires which we light on Beacon Hill will be of congratulation and joy." A year later, Sumner presided over the Republican State Convention in Worcester and again spoke of the Commonwealth and more specifically Boston as "an example to our country and a bulwark of human rights." He urged the delegates to look back to the eighteenth century, a time "when on the continent of Europe, the name of 'Bostonians' was given to our countrymen in arms against the mother country, making this designation embrace all." Sumner's Boston, a city rooted in a heroic past and markedly different from the rest of urbanizing America, was a critical point of self-identification.⁶

At Worcester, Sumner, the great American liberal, ironically invoked Edmund Burke, the eminent British conservative. The Bostonian cited Burke's century-old speech before Parliament of December 5, 1774. Going back to the era of the American Revolution, the senator borrowed from Burke to suggest "the cause of Boston is become the cause of all America; every part of America is united in support of Boston. . . . [Y]ou have made Boston the Lord Mayor of America." Burke's pre-Revolutionary warning became, in Sumner's retelling, a source of local pride and a call to action for Republicans.⁷

Sumner by no means represented a united Republican movement in the Commonwealth. In the years after the Civil War, the party was split between the senator's radical faction, centered around the Bird Club, and more conservative elements. The divisions among Massachusetts

Republicans often took personal form in the rivalry between Sumner and the state's governor, John Andrew. As Eric L. McKittrick argued, the two men, "though united in bonds of rectitude, were infinitely separated in mind and temperament."⁸ As Sumner neared the end of his terms in both 1862 and 1868, considerable opposition emerged within his own party. Senator Sumner's popularity in his home state was at a particularly low point just as the Civil War came to an end. In 1865 and 1866, the senator was subject to escalating criticism from Democrats and some Republicans in Massachusetts.⁹ Charles Francis Adams was a particular antagonist. The two men clashed not only over international affairs and abstract ideals, but also about the two statesmen's divergent visions of their home Commonwealth.¹⁰ For a quarter century, a fragile coalition within the Commonwealth's Republican Party maintained Sumner in office.

In the war's aftermath, Sumner would walk a tightrope in his home state until his death in 1874. With Lincoln's assassination, there was no clear unifying leader of the Republican Party in Washington, D.C. As much as any of his contemporaries, Sumner came to symbolize post-Lincoln Republicanism on a national stage. At the same time, even while dedicated to the nation's work in Washington, D.C., the senator had to maintain his base in Boston and among Republicans throughout Massachusetts.

Charles Sumner relied on support from a range of constituencies in Massachusetts. David Donald correctly located the core of Sumner's appeal among "idealistic groups, such as the clergymen, the women, and especially the young voters of Massachusetts, who were hostile to the institutions and the compromises of American political life."¹¹ Francis W. Bird and other members of the Bird Club in Boston sustained Sumner through a number of rough points in the years after the Civil War. The Boston *Commonwealth*, founded in 1862 by club members, was Sumner's most consistent advocate in local Boston-area political battles. Sumner relied on the paper both to ward off local challenges within his party and to battle with the Commonwealth's Democratic Party leadership. In the struggle leading up to his reelection in 1868, Sumner worked behind the scenes to secure another term in Washington. In the late spring of 1867, the *Commonwealth* published articles questioning former Governor Andrew's support for national Reconstruction.¹²

Upon the conclusion of campaigns in Boston and his return to the nation's capital, Sumner consistently invoked his home state in making

arguments on the floor of the Senate. In his rhetoric, Massachusetts was imagined as the ideal case of nineteenth-century American democracy, a model against which all other states and regions were bound to come up short. On one such occasion, in early 1865, just weeks before Lincoln's second inaugural, Sumner led the fight against a proposed bust of Roger Taney, the recently deceased chief justice. Amid repeated denunciations of Taney and Northern Democrats, Sumner turned his address into a celebration of the special values that set Massachusetts apart from the rest of the nation: "There is Massachusetts—, my own honored Commonwealth. From the earliest days of her history slavery found little favor with her legislature or her people." Sumner proceeded to reargue the *Scott* case of a decade earlier, this time using New England's history to contradict Taney's uses of the eighteenth-century record. Sumner worked to invent a usable past for Massachusetts, downplaying the state's long history of slavery.¹³

A year later, in the fall of 1866, as Sumner mounted his opposition to President Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policies, he again made use of the image of Massachusetts to condemn Southern vices. In his first Massachusetts address in over a year, Sumner spoke on the evening of October 2 to a group of supporters at the Boston Music Hall on "The One Man Power vs. Congress." In an attempt to make sense of the current impasse, the senator took his audience back to the seventeenth century and highlighted the divergent origins of Massachusetts and Virginia. In Sumner's interpretation, the Puritan Commonwealth deserved our gratitude, in fact "deserves immortality" for the 1647 decision to authorize common schools. Against the noble example of New England, Sumner went on, "at the same time Virginia set herself openly against free schools." Sumner advanced the claim that "thus spoke Massachusetts, and thus spoke Virginia, in that ancient day. The conflict of ideas had already begun." From this interpretation of colonial history, Sumner argued that the nation needed to embrace Massachusetts's values of public education and antislavery.¹⁴

One particular core of consistent support for the senator came from the politicized black citizens of Boston after the Civil War. Throughout Sumner's first years in the Senate, Massachusetts African Americans had supported his tireless work against slavery amid the increasingly contentious political culture of 1850s Washington. With Northern victory and in anticipation of black suffrage, the African American–Sumner alliance reached its high point in the late 1860s. Even before the Civil

War had ended, Sumner was one of the first national politicians to embrace black suffrage, a cause for which Northern African Americans had been struggling for generations. In a February 1865 Senate debate, Sumner demanded a Reconstruction founded upon African American voting rights. While many Northern Democrats seized on Sumner's words to demonize Republicans, black Bostonians voiced enthusiastic support for their senator. As Dr. J. B. Smith explained in a note to Sumner, "I know of no words or any language adequate to convey to you the gratitude I feel in my inmost soul towards you for your efforts and final success. . . . The white people of this country have been so accustomed to regard and treat [us] as their natural inferiors, that we dread the very thought of submitting to them the adjustment of our rights after their own are made secure. What is not gained for us now will not be obtained for a quarter of a century after peace is declared." Smith's note illuminates both black support for Sumner and the ways in which African American correspondents worked to push Sumner to take ever more decisive action in pursuit of black freedom.¹⁵

Before 1865 was over, Sumner was already working to memorialize the wartime contributions of Massachusetts African Americans. In the first two years of the war, he had fought for black enlistment in the United States military; beginning in 1863, the senator loyally supported the officers and enlisted men in the various black regiments. On October 2, 1865, Sumner placed an ad in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* joining his name to the list of those calling for the construction of a fitting memorial to the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment. In Sumner's words, "especially let legislators of Massachusetts—by daily sight of the symbolic statue, be gratefully led to constant support of the cause for which [they] had died." Sumner went on to note numerous black Bostonians who had already donated funds in support of the proposed memorial.¹⁶

In the wake of the Civil War, veterans' organizations proved to be critical bases of support. Across Massachusetts, returning Northern soldiers established Grand Army of the Republic posts after 1865. Sumner spoke to an interracial audience of Worcester veterans at the G.A.R. hall in 1869 on "The Origins of Caste Divisions."¹⁷ He consistently imagined a community of veterans across lines of color. In his speeches to veterans' groups, wartime heroism was linked to the struggle for postwar interracial democracy.

The early 1870s witnessed a steady decline in Sumner's popularity and influence, both nationally and in Massachusetts politics. In 1871, as Sum-

ner lost his chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, some Bay State conservatives cheered the long-awaited fall of the state's senior senator. John H. Clifford, the former governor, was but one of many voices raised in opposition to Sumner.¹⁸ The following year brought intensified anti-Sumner agitation in the Commonwealth. A late-August Republican rally at Faneuil Hall was exceptional for the passion of the statements made against the senator. Supporters of President Grant and longtime Sumner antagonists came together for a kickoff rally in support of the national Republican ticket. Quickly the event turned into one of the most spectacular anti-Sumner gatherings of the era. The assembled partisans booed mentions of the senator. The site is particularly ironic, as Faneuil Hall had been the site of so many of the senator's greatest triumphs in the previous quarter-century.¹⁹

Sumner's support of Horace Greeley and the Liberal Republican ticket in 1872, rooted in his long-standing rivalry with President Grant, worked to alienate some of the senator's most loyal supporters in Massachusetts. Black voters were especially troubled by Sumner's apparent desertion of the Republican cause. As Sumner broke with the Grant administration in the buildup to the 1872 campaign, he temporarily lost a good deal of his decades-long support in the state's African American community. Grant's leadership in securing passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the federal Constitution and his dogged enforcement of the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 had only served to consolidate his support among Massachusetts blacks. Sumner's unwillingness to back Grant's reelection campaign caused concern with some Bay State African Americans.

In the late summer of 1872, a public meeting of the black citizens of Worcester articulated the sense of abandonment felt by many African Americans across Massachusetts. William H. Jenkins, a Worcester barber and ex-slave, lumped Sumner and Greeley together with "Jeff Davis & Company." After spending most of his speech attacking Greeley and defending Grant, J. F. Manning of Boston turned to the senior senator from Massachusetts. Manning announced that Sumner "had driven the nails into his own political coffin."²⁰ Though certainly not universal, a good deal of ambivalence characterized black New Englanders' sense of Sumner's last three years in office.

Wendell Phillips, the Boston firebrand and long one of the senator's closest friends, joined with many other reform Republicans in criticizing Sumner's stand in 1872. After the Cincinnati convention nominated

Greeley, Phillips, the leading abolitionist, wrote to Sumner, "Whatever criticism I make of your position will be made with the sharpest regret and wrung from me by the gravest conviction of duty to the negro race, which your mistake exposes to such horrible peril."²¹ Other former allies echoed Phillips in articulating a sense that Sumner was losing his way. After 1872, Sumner's problems in Massachusetts only grew worse. Divisions within the state's Republican Party intensified; the party's leadership soon voted to censure the senator for having bolted in the 1872 campaign. The final year and a half of Sumner's life was something of a tragedy, as he found himself isolated even from the reform wing of his home state's party.

By the time of Sumner's death in March 1874, the senator had been a central player in the reconstruction both of the nation and of Boston. His funeral illuminated the changed public culture of his home city. Sumner died on March 11, 1874; that night, thousands of mourners gathered at Faneuil Hall. Governor William B. Washburn, soon to be selected to fill Sumner's Senate seat, declared that Wednesday an official day of mourning for all of Massachusetts.²² The senator's body made its way up from Washington, D.C., reached Beacon Hill by Sunday, March 15, and lay in state in the State House's Doric Hall. Profound symbolic import was attached to the official presence of the members of the African American Shaw Guard. The black veterans of the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Colored Regiment stood by the body as thousands of Sumner's constituents came to pay their final respects. On the coffin lay the motto: "Don't Let the Civil Rights Bill Fail." Boston's grief came to a head on March 16, as thousands filled the city's streets to witness the funeral procession.

Massachusetts African Americans played a significant, though at times separate part in the funeral procession. The line of march concluded with over two thousand black men, representing numerous social and political organizations from around Massachusetts. The official memorial noted the participation of "Fraternal and Hancock Organizations of Boston, and Post 134 of the 'Grand Army of the Republic.'"²³ Across the state, black congregations held memorial services for Sumner at the time of the funeral service in Boston.²⁴ So much had changed in Sumner's public career: Northern victory in the Civil War, the emancipation of four million enslaved African Americans, the postbellum remaking of the federal Constitution. Few national political or intellectual figures have ever been so influential in forever transforming the politics of race

in America. And yet even in his beloved home state Sumner's funeral procession embodied the segregated public life that would in so many ways characterize the next century of the long history of the American dilemma.

Amos Webber, an African American veteran in Worcester, noted his reaction to Sumner's passing in his diary entries for mid-March 1874. Webber had helped organize the anti-Greeley movement of 1872 in central Massachusetts, a movement that lost patience with Sumner and in some cases outright denounced the senator. Eighteen months later, Webber noted Sumner's passing in his diary; Webber was struck by the fact that Sumner's "last words were take care of the civil rights bill, which yet showed his great interest in the colored people till the last; (breath);"²⁵ With the senator's death, many Massachusetts African Americans joined Webber in reclaiming a mythical Sumner, the great white champion of black rights. Such memories of the senator's career grew partly out of appreciation for decades of loyal service, certainly, but also out of a growing pessimism about the fate of the struggle for equal citizenship as Massachusetts and the nation inched toward the end of Reconstruction and the dawn of an era far less in keeping with Sumner's vision of an interracial democracy.

Notes

1. David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960), and *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (New York: Knopf, 1970). Anne-Marie Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

2. Forty years ago, Eric McKittrick remarked, "History itself has been wanting in justice to the man." Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 228. The judgment remains valid.

3. Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), presents a particularly sophisticated exploration of politics in the Commonwealth in the Sumner era.

4. Carl Schurz, *Charles Sumner: An Essay*, ed. Arthur Reed Hogue (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951), 81.

5. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, ix.

6. "The Rebel Party, Speech at the Flag-Raising of the Grant and Colfax Club in Ward Six, Boston," September 14, 1868, in *The Works of Charles Sumner*,

vol. 12 (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1877), 510, 514; Sumner speech to the Republican State Convention in Worcester, September 22, 1869, *Works of Charles Sumner*, vol. 13 (Boston, 1880), 98.

7. Ibid.

8. Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, 226. McKittrick offers the most original reading of moderation and even conservatism in Civil War era Boston.

9. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 235, 243.

10. Tensions between Sumner's radical Republicans and the Adams dynasty were not limited to his rivalry with Charles Francis Adams. In 1867 John Quincy Adams Jr. (son of Charles Francis Adams) was the Democratic nominee for governor of Massachusetts. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 345.

11. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 10.

12. *Commonwealth* (Boston), June 8, 1867.

13. "No Bust for Author of Dred Scott Decision," speech in U.S. Senate, February 23, 1865, in *Works of Charles Sumner*, vol. 9 (Boston, 1874), 270.

14. "The One Man Power vs. Congress. The Present Situation. Address at the Opening of the Annual Lectures of the Parker Fraternity, at the Music Hall, Boston, October 2, 1866," in *Works of Charles Sumner*, vol. 11 (Boston, 1875), 157.

15. On Northern black struggles for equal suffrage, see David N. Gellman and David Quigley, eds., *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). "No Reconstruction Without the Votes of the Blacks," excerpts from Senate debate, February 24-26, 1865, and letters from Massachusetts supporters, in *Works of Charles Sumner*, 9:311-23, 327-28.

16. "Self-Sacrifice for the Colored Race," October 2, 1865, in *Works of Charles Sumner*, 9:493-94. The best study of the Saint-Gaudens memorial that was dedicated in 1895 and of the field of Civil War memory is David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

17. On the Worcester talk, see Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 168. The best study of the Grand Army of the Republic and evolving political cultures of late-nineteenth-century America is Stuart Charles McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

18. Clifford to Hamilton Fish, March 13, 1871, as quoted in Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 498.

19. For an earlier Faneuil Hall pro-Sumner rally, see "Rejoicing in the Decline of the Rebellion," September 6, 1864, in *Works of Charles Sumner*, 9:64. See also Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 554.

20. *Evening Gazette*, August 24, 1872. Salvatore's *We All Got History* provides a detailed account of local black politics in Gilded Age Worcester.

21. Wendell Phillips to Charles Sumner, August 4, 1872, Sumner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

22. The best account of Sumner's death and the surrounding events is in Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, 3–12.

23. *Memorial of Charles Sumner* (Boston: Wright and Potters, 1874), 86.

24. Salvatore, *We All Got Freedom*, 210, notes services at the Zion and Bethel A.M.E. Churches on March 16, 1874.

25. Amos Webber Thermometer Record and Diary, American Steel and Wire Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, entries for March 11 and 14, 1874, cited in Salvatore, *We All Got Freedom*, 210.

The Irish Question and Boston Politics

LAWRENCE W. KENNEDY

BOSTON'S HISTORY NEEDS TO ACCOUNT for the Irish experience in a new way. While much has been made of the perilous threat that the immigrant Irish seemed to pose to the vitality of Boston in the nineteenth century, little attention has been paid to the question of Ireland itself. The point to be made is that since Irish nationalism helped to divide residents of Boston along political lines it is necessary to consider the political impact of Ireland's subservience to Great Britain in the late nineteenth century. The crucial period was the 1880s.

The Irish question of the 1880s was, What should be the proper relationship between Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom? Ireland, long under English domination, had been, since the Act of Union in 1800, a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Daniel O'Connell unsuccessfully challenged this union in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Great Famine of the 1840s and 1850s surely must also be reckoned in explaining Irish American politics in Boston and elsewhere.¹ By the 1880s the nationalist movement in Ireland included three strains: revolutionary republicanism, or Fenianism; parliamentary efforts to achieve Home Rule; and the social and economic struggles of the agrarian poor.² Most relevant to the Irish in 1880s Boston was the Irish Home Rule movement led by Charles Stewart Parnell, which called for the restoration of an Irish parliament. At this time, Irish Catholics under the parliamentary leadership of Parnell, a Protestant landowner, and with the support of sometime Prime Minister William Gladstone, sought to return at least some governmental authority to Dublin.³ Alas for the Irish, the Home Rule movement sank in the wake of the infamous Kitty O'Shea divorce scandal, which destroyed Parnell's career.⁴

The Home Rule fight during the late 1880s had a crucial effect in

defining Boston politics from that period into the twentieth century. England's Irish question in the 1880s was of real concern not only to Bostonians of Irish birth and descent, but it also came to be an issue to others who disliked both the Irish and their native land.⁵ In addition to understanding class and religious differences between Irish immigrants and other elements in the city, we need to take seriously the political values that nineteenth-century Bostonians held and struggled over. One of these values was Irish nationalism, the notion that the Irish people by right should have at least some form of self-government. There was, of course, considerable dispute among Irish Catholics over what nationalism meant and what it should lead to in Ireland. To better understand Boston politics we need to understand Ireland, and Boston must be seen in the transatlantic context.⁶

Historians of political behavior have placed more emphasis on the religious than the ethnic origins of nineteenth-century voters ever since Lee Benson's pioneering study of Jacksonian democracy.⁷ Generally these historians advanced the "thesis that religion was the salient factor in nineteenth-century voting behavior."⁸ Thomas N. Brown's classic *Irish-American Nationalism* emphasizes ethnicity but argues that such nationalism was largely a means whereby the Irish could be assimilated in the United States and that Irish self-government was merely a secondary objective that served the psychological and social needs of the Irish.⁹ Eric Foner contends that "the Brown thesis suffers from a fatal narrowness of vision." This is because "it views working-class life simply as a transitional stage on the road to bourgeois respectability and defines assimilation solely as acquisition of middle-class values that enabled the Irish immigrant to accommodate . . . to an often hostile environment."¹⁰

The issue of class is clearly significant in considering the opponents of Irish Americans. As David H. Bennett writes, "anti-Irish, anti-Catholic rhetoric was only part" of the appeal of the American Protective Association in the 1880s. They "also appealed to a disfranchised Protestant middle class experiencing status anxieties in an age of social upheaval, people who deeply resented the emergence of a visible Catholic middle class."¹¹

Beyond issues of class, it should be emphasized that genuine passion about the political question of how Ireland should be governed engendered serious debate in Boston and precipitated hostility toward the local Irish community. Conflict in Boston was not simply a product of religious or class differences. We need to take the Irish question seriously; people of the nineteenth century did. We need to look at the effects of

Irish nationalism not only on the Irish but also on those whom they lived with, worked for, and competed against. Especially important were the British Americans who were offended by Irish nationalism and sought to express their own sense of transatlantic heritage, that of pride in the British Empire. This was the age of imperialism, after all, and such emotion was real and powerful.

By the 1880s Irish group consciousness, evident in educational, philanthropic, and political spheres, reflected a growing assertiveness and posed a challenge to Brahmin domination.¹² The Irish were, in fact, becoming quite boastful about their growing numbers and influence in Boston. A press report in 1887 showed that first- and second-generation Irish in Boston formed over 56 percent of the population.¹³ The local Irish press published these figures in order to instill pride and boost confidence. Parades, too, came to be important expressions of Irish pride; after a lapse of several years, a St. Patrick's Day parade was held in Boston in 1887. Irish literary, temperance, and benefit associations paraded on Broadway in South Boston but, unlike today, also marched through the North End and Charlestown before wending through the Public Garden and on to the State House and City Hall.¹⁴

More alarming than any parade, however, was the Irish exercise of political power.¹⁵ At the start of 1887 Irish Catholics led the city government of Boston. The mayor, president of the Board of Aldermen, president of the Common Council, and city clerk were all Irish Catholics.¹⁶ In 1887 Irish-born Hugh O'Brien was in his third term as mayor.¹⁷ Boastfulness about such Irish political power aroused other ethnic groups, notably British Americans. There were, of course, many issues related to the Irish ascendancy in Boston politics, but matters in Ireland and Britain were significant in arousing political opposition to the Irish.

The debate over Irish Home Rule spilled over into Boston politics in this time period. The Home Rule issue in the 1880s united Irish people in Boston but also ignited and united opposition. The Home Rule issue diverted the Irish in Boston from other matters and also gave their opponents a reason and an excuse for attacking politicians such as Hugh O'Brien and Patrick Collins, a former Fenian and a future mayor. As Arthur Mann saw it, the Irish were self-absorbed and to a great degree culturally isolated. "Such come-outism as existed was channeled into and siphoned off by agitation against the ancestral enemy, England."¹⁸ Or as Robert Cross writes, the Irish who fled to America believed their kind might "be the key figures in securing the redemption of the old country

from British misrule.”¹⁹ The problem was that as Irish people stirred up passions about Irish Home Rule, they seemed to be distancing themselves from American concerns and from their fellow Americans, especially those of British ancestry. For every agitation there was a reaction. “Although the Irish sought vengeance against the British government rather than against the British immigrants, many of the latter rallied about Her Majesty’s Government in any Irish crisis.”²⁰ Similarly, Irish parliamentary obstruction led by Parnell “goaded the British to hysterical displays of anti-Irish prejudice and reanimated Irish and Irish-American enthusiasm for the Home Rule cause.”²¹

Perhaps the dominant theme in Irish American literature is that devoted to “justifying immigrant loyalty to Ireland and reconciling it with their loyalty to the United States.”²² To what extent could a good Irishman be a good American? Local leaders attempted to answer this question, and it seems that Maguire, Collins, and others “sought recognition of their own and their group’s respectability by the city’s Yankee elite.”²³

The immigrant Irish paper, the *Pilot*, argued that although no political allegiance was owed to Ireland, an Irish American “does owe some sentimental allegiance to the unhappy, faithful and liberty-loving country of his fathers.”²⁴ *Pilot* editor John Boyle O’Reilly, who was “hailed as a leading New England writer” and welcomed to speak before prominent Boston organizations, devoted his Boston years to “selling Irish immigrants to Bostonians and American patriotism to the newcomers.”²⁵ In the 1888 dedication of the monument to Crispus Attucks and other victims of the Boston Massacre, O’Reilly’s poem, “Crispus Attucks,” attempted to show the unity of mankind by linking the American struggle against the British with the Irish and black struggles for freedom.²⁶

Patrick Collins had gone to Harvard Law School and shed the “Paddy” in him but, as Geoffrey Blodgett observes, he remained a moderate Irish nationalist all his life.²⁷ Collins’s political success in the 1880s (at this point a member of the United States Congress) was often dependent on his ability to “exploit the sentiments of Irish-America.”²⁸ Victor Greene writes that Collins “rose to national prominence partly on an Irish constituency, [and] he had considerable influence in the community. He like others showed many of his supporters that to be Irish was also to be American.”²⁹ Collins addressed the issue of national allegiance at a London dinner hosted by Charles Stewart Parnell in Collins’s honor. He told the audience that the Irish in the New World were intensely American “and we shall not cease to be Irish until Ireland has no further need of us.”³⁰

William Shannon posed the dilemma this way: in one sense "the loyalty of the American Irish to the cause of Irish nationalism can be understood as a variant of their loyalty to the United States and not an alternative to it."³¹ While these Irish American leaders may have reconciled these dual loyalties to themselves, they did not persuade their enemies. The nativist theme of divided loyalties was a persistent refrain of opponents of the Irish in America and a constant impediment to Irish assimilation and acceptance in Boston.

The Irish Home Rule issue of the 1880s was one loaded with emotion, and so-called "monster meetings" on behalf of Irish Home Rule were held periodically at Faneuil Hall. (These meetings were modeled on Daniel O'Connell's repeal campaign in Ireland earlier in the century.) In 1885, the first year of Mayor Hugh O'Brien's tenure, for example, one such meeting was held on October 19, and the mayor pointedly compared the Home Rulers to the Bostonians of 1776 who had "so forcibly resisted British oppression."³² The next spring another such meeting was held, chaired by O'Brien, who was assisted by prominent Bostonians such as John Boyle O'Reilly. O'Brien, on this occasion, expressed his admiration for William Gladstone, the British prime minister who had recently been converted to the cause of Home Rule. O'Brien rejoiced that "the leading statesman of the British Empire—the most wonderful nation on the face of the earth, on whose dominion the sun never sets . . . stands up in his manhood and says that the wrongs of Ireland must be righted."³³ Gladstone's telegram to O'Brien, read at the meeting, asserted that American opinion, "allied as it is with regard and affection for the old country, affords Her Majesty's Government a powerful, moral support."

Mayor O'Brien presided at another Irish Home Rule meeting in July 1886, the same month the Irish National League opened a national office in Boston.³⁴ The league sponsored yet another monster meeting in April of 1887 at Faneuil Hall. The specific purpose of this meeting was to denounce the Coercion Bill that Disraeli's Tory government had introduced to quell disturbances in Ireland. Mayor O'Brien was again a featured speaker and (now that Gladstone was out of office) argued that the British were "a disgrace to the civilization of the nineteenth century."³⁵ The mayor again linked Home Rule to the American revolutionary struggle and claimed that Boston's ancestry and tradition for one hundred years was "a remonstrance against the tyranny and oppression

of Great Britain." Patrick Collins sent a letter protesting "the latest stupid and brutal Tory attempt to strangle Ireland."

Famed Irish leader William O'Brien came to Boston in the late spring of 1887 (soon after his release from a British prison) and succeeded in bringing Irish nationalist emotions to a peak. His protest against the Coercion Bill attracted an audience of over five thousand and, according to John Boyle O'Reilly, was "the first note of the American celebration of the Queen of England's jubilee."³⁶ It may have been the first sound, but it was certainly not the most noteworthy. In June of 1887 the British American backlash began: Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebration was the spark. Symbols were very important to all sides in the emerging disputes.³⁷

The Irish held most of their great meetings for Ireland in Faneuil Hall, the symbol and "cradle of liberty." As the antislavery agitators had mobilized opinion so too did the Irish American leadership. Faneuil Hall possessed great symbolic significance—meeting there seemed to legitimize the Irish cause and to situate the Home Rule movement within the Boston tradition of freedom and liberty. When the Irish American leadership attempted to prevent Protestant British Americans from using this same hall, trouble erupted. The fiftieth anniversary of Victoria's ascension to the throne in Britain ignited passionate feelings, which spilled over into political action.

Protestant British Americans formed a coalition that drove Hugh O'Brien from City Hall and captured control of city government and the public schools. This was part of a larger nativist attack on immigrants, which culminated in the establishment of local branches of the American Protective Association. Protestant preachers, woman suffrage leaders, Republicans, and assorted other opponents of Irish Catholics succeeded in retarding Irish Catholic political power in Boston and reinforcing the cultural tradition of pessimism and a sense of inferiority among the local Irish Catholic community.³⁸ The Jubilee banquet controversy stimulated a broad-based attack on the Irish American community in Boston.

To make sense of Boston politics during this era, historians must be mindful of the city's growing British American population. Boston's growing population of Protestant immigrants, coming from either Britain or the Canadian Maritime Provinces, totaled about 40,000 in 1887.³⁹ Many of these British Americans prepared to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee with a banquet, to be served in Faneuil Hall.

The *Pilot* claimed that if Gladstone's Home Rule Bill had passed all Ireland and twenty million Irish Americans would have joined in the spirit of this occasion.⁴⁰ As things were, however, the Irish in Boston vehemently opposed the celebration.⁴¹ Long-standing historical conflict between Scots-Irish transplants in Ulster and the native Irish who were displaced from this province in the north of Ireland explains a good bit of the problem in Boston. The Scots, who came to Ireland as agents of colonization and pacification of England's closest colony, were Presbyterian. The Scottish heritage of hatred and political conflict with the Roman Catholic Irish was celebrated by Orange lodges in Ireland and elsewhere. These lodges derived their name from the victory of Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 (a victory that continues to be both celebrated and divisive in Ireland in the twenty-first century).

In 1860 the *Pilot* had commented that it was "not a little strange that Orangery still exists. So atrocious a spirit is out of place in the nineteenth century."⁴² New York experienced its famous Orange Riots after the Civil War.⁴³ During the summer of 1886 the *Pilot* gleefully carried accounts of Orange riots in Ireland, in which the Protestant opponents of Irish Home Rule violently expressed their views.⁴⁴ Crowds of protestors rampaged through the streets in defiance of the Liberal government proposals for Home Rule, which the Protestants believed would mean "Rome Rule." Donald H. Akenson observes that the political union of Great Britain and Ireland (long perceived as Catholic Ireland's greatest problem) was for most Protestants in Ireland "not a problem but a much needed answer . . . to the question of how to avoid being swallowed up by the Catholic majority."⁴⁵ Although the Irish in America may have "sought vengeance against the British government rather than against the British immigrants, many of the latter rallied about Her Majesty's Government in any Irish crisis."⁴⁶ As Kerby Miller writes, "Irish parliamentary obstructionism alone could not achieve home rule, but it goaded the British into hysterical displays of anti-Irish prejudice and reanimated Irish and Irish-American enthusiasm for the home rule cause."⁴⁷

Just as there were explicit ties between the Catholic Irish in America and Ireland, so too the Orangemen in the United States maintained communication with their counterparts across the Atlantic. Ulster Orangemen sent a petition to the American Presbyterian Assembly in 1886 asking the group for a denunciation of Home Rule for Ireland. The *Pilot* denounced this call as an "intolerant scream" and argued that if the

American Presbyterians endorsed it, they would show themselves "unfit to be American citizens."⁴⁸ Clearly, these were fighting words. Closer to home, several Orangemen opposed Irish Home Rule at a Music Hall meeting in Boston during the fall of 1886. The event drew, besides the "loyal brethren," some protestors whose howling and hissing interrupted the oration. Denying the charge that the hoodlums were "Roman Catholic Irishmen," the *Pilot* argued instead that they were agents hired at fifty cents a head to "disgrace Ireland, advertise the Orangemen, and lessen the favorable public opinion which is spreading throughout America for the Irish cause."⁴⁹

The point seemed clear to some, however, that while the Irish could agitate in favor of Home Rule, the opposition was denied the right to express its view. This perception was reinforced in the 1887 controversy over the Queen's Jubilee banquet. This banquet is the beginning of, not the culmination of conflict. While violence never developed, it was nevertheless a significant event. The importance of this incident lies in how it galvanized opposition to Irish Catholic political power in Boston.

Boston's Board of Aldermen granted James Wemyss and others a permit to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee with a June 21 banquet at Faneuil Hall.⁵⁰ E. M. Chamberlin and other local figures, however, petitioned the board to reverse the decision and withdraw the permit. The aldermen appointed a committee to consider the matter, and the committee report, issued the day before the proposed banquet, stated that "it does not seem proper that the Cradle of Liberty should be misused" and recommended that the permit be revoked.⁵¹ The full board had a tie vote on the report, however, so plans for the banquet continued.⁵²

Local Irishmen were outraged that the friends of tyranny would pollute Faneuil Hall and argued that the United States would be untrue to the heroes of the American Revolution if the famous Cradle of Liberty were desecrated by a British royalist banquet. Taking a slightly different tack, the *Pilot* argued that this was not a free speech issue at all; a meeting opposed to the Home Rule cause would have been fine, but a bazaar, dance, or banquet in historic Faneuil Hall was wrong.⁵³

Irish nationalists had planned a protest meeting the night of the aldermen's decision allowing the Jubilee banquet to proceed, but the crowd forming outside Faneuil Hall was surprised to see the building dark and shut. The janitor came out at the appointed time of eight o'clock and told the crowd that the permit for the evening's protest meeting was imperfect and invalid. Mr. Bolton, the janitor, claimed his sympathies

were with the meeting but said, "If I don't do my duty my head will be cut off."⁵⁴

Not to be stopped, the crowd rallied on the steps of Quincy Market, a few paces across the square. Suddenly, at 8:45 P.M., the doors to Faneuil Hall were opened. Perhaps the size and intensity of the crowd convinced the janitor that the permit was indeed valid.⁵⁵ At any rate, the crowd entered the hall and listened to a variety of speakers, including John Boyle O'Reilly, who protested against "the murder of a tradition" and vowed never again to speak in Faneuil Hall once it was desecrated by the royalist banquet.⁵⁶ (An editorial in the *Transcript* stated that "Boston, we suppose, could survive such a catastrophe.")⁵⁷ E. M. Chamberlin, who chaired the meeting, told the audience that "you know very well that this scheme of the Britishers in Boston is simply a Tory trick to bolster up the party which now controls England, Ireland and India."⁵⁸

Perhaps the words of John Boyle O'Reilly aided in maintaining the peace the next night. He said, "Let the Englishmen have Faneuil Hall" and told the crowd that opposition to the celebration was too late. "The man who would raise a finger against an Englishman to-morrow in Boston, is unworthy to be present here tonight. There is a greater opposition than the opposition of paving-stones and bludgeons."⁵⁹ The meeting continued with several more speakers: one local paper declared that it was "about as senseless a demonstration as the city of Boston has ever seen."⁶⁰

The next night, Tuesday, June 21, was the time for the Jubilee banquet itself. The authorities reckoned on trouble and secured a heavy police presence; there were some three hundred police, including twenty on horseback, patrolling around Faneuil Hall. The hall itself was roped off but guests were harassed as they approached the building. A large crowd of "reckless characters" congregated outside this area, especially by the statue of Sam Adams.⁶¹ Someone shouted to the crowd that there was a pile of bricks on nearby Union Street, but when the crowd ran over there, a squad of mounted police met them.

As it turns out, inside the hall a fairly quiet banquet took place. The British American crowd was mostly younger. The dinner was sponsored by the British Charitable Society, the Scots Charitable Society, the Caldonian Club, Sons of St. George, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, and some other minor societies.⁶² The head table included James Wemyss, Alderman Allen, several clergymen from St. Paul's and the Park Street Church, and William Grandison, of the British-American

Benevolent Association, Colored. Governor Ames declined to attend, pleading engagements in the western part of the state. The absence of the governor, mayor, and other state and city officials demonstrated to the participating British Americans the need to take a more active role in politics.⁶³ This is the key point: within a matter of weeks, British Americans began to organize for political action. This organizational effort paved the way for a broader attack on Irish Catholic power but was initially based on the issue of Irish nationalism and the feelings that this passion aroused in others who were not Irish.

Although only three hundred men were reported at this subsequent organizational meeting of British Americans, James Wemyss, president of the Consolidated British Societies, claimed there were over 27,000 Sons of St. George in Massachusetts.⁶⁴ The *Pilot* derided the organizing British Americans as "pitiful radicals in motive and fools in foresight."⁶⁵ It observed that the only place that the British population outnumbered the Irish population to a significant extent was in Utah, "the moral plague-spot and cesspool of the continent."⁶⁶ Local British Americans, however offended, were not daunted and formed a British-American Association, which published an explanatory pamphlet entitled *Faneuil Hall: Who Are Its Conservators?*

The authors explained the origin of their group by referring to Home Rule agitation. They stated in the pamphlet that "recent events in Boston" showed that the Irish, "with the tacit acquiescence . . . of those in city government," made "sympathy with their alien agitations" a requirement for other foreign-born citizens.⁶⁷ The organization, however, aimed at "an honest renunciation of and disassociation from foreign politics and alien agitations," which represented a "systematic abuse of the rights of citizenship by a certain class of adventurers."⁶⁸ The British Americans suggested that such adventurers posed a danger to the Republic and were little short of a disgrace. They contended that:

The bane of the large cities in the United States is the active participation in their politics of large numbers of voters who have hastened to throw off their allegiance to one power, more from hatred of the government they have left, than love of the country to which they have come, and whose ignorant prejudices and passionate resentments are skillfully manipulated in the interests of the meanest class of politicians.⁶⁹

The authors of this British-American Association pamphlet sadly contrasted the eagerness of the Irish to participate in politics with the

reluctance of the British to become naturalized. The consequence, they felt, was that British Americans were ignored. Many politicians felt that the Irish vote and influence "were the only things necessary to placate. In this way the press of this city has become the catspaw of Irish schemes."⁷⁰

In particular, the Jubilee banquet angered British Americans. The British-American Association asserted in the pamphlet that the Jubilee banquet was designed to be inclusive.⁷¹ The pamphlet's authors argued that the Charitable Irish Society had been invited to participate in the celebration but had rudely refused. This was, they asserted, a missed opportunity. "Had the Irish leaders possessed the ability to lead a drove of pigs to market, they would have eagerly seized the opportunity to send from Boston to London and Dublin a verdict for Home Rule brought in by a jury of all three nationalities."⁷² Such a united stand would have been doubtful.

The authors of the pamphlet then proceeded to state the principles of the British-American Association. The ostensible purpose of the organization was to promote "good feelings and harmony" between Britain and the United States. To achieve its purposes, the organization advocated the naturalization of all British subjects and their active participation in American politics as its chief immediate objectives. According to the last census, they claimed, more emigrants landed in the United States from the island of Great Britain than from any other country. If the forces represented by these numbers were mobilized in politics, the consequences would be great.⁷³

The British-American Association denied that there was any British gold behind their campaign and so appealed to readers for money. The pamphlet *Faneuil Hall* was to be disseminated across the nation in hopes that "the seed it sows shall bring forth a rich harvest."⁷⁴ Locally the goal was to come up with five thousand voters within two years in order to defeat Hugh O'Brien, whose last victory was by a margin of four thousand votes. The group shortly became a national body, although Massachusetts men controlled it almost entirely, and its greatest strength remained in the New England states.

The movement established a national newspaper, the *British-American Citizen*, published in Boston, which carried what a later writer described as "vitriolic anti-Irish and anti-Catholic propaganda."⁷⁵ The Orangemen of Boston also took to the streets and came out in force on the infamous July 12 holiday, but the Catholic Irish were urged to pay little heed to the parade, the *Pilot* urging that "contempt is worse than

paving stones.”⁷⁶ The paper also believed that these parades were “the symptoms of a political disease born of poison and living through corruption.”⁷⁷ Specifically, the Orange affliction was like “malaria and other foul diseases that we cannot get rid of, and must be prepared for.” Such parades continue in Northern Ireland over a century later and afford us a glimpse into the mindset of people similar to these long-gone Bostonians.

Irish political success is accepted as a key part in explaining the local revival of opposition and bigotry.⁷⁸ As their political power grew, so too did the fear that Irish Catholics were ruining Boston and urban America. It was believed that the Irish fostered corrupt and inefficient government, brought foreign issues to American politics, and endangered the rights of Protestants.⁷⁹ In 1887 Boston, with Irish Catholic Hugh O’Brien in charge of city hall, British Protestants could complain of maladministration of the city, even though his greatest offense may have been the symbolic closing of the Boston Public Library on St. Patrick’s Day or Evacuation Day.

In addition, many feared increasing Catholic influence over public schools. The key local conflict was the school issue. The organized British American society expressed fear for the survival of the public school system in a city that was becoming increasingly Catholic. From this wellspring the British American society was able to become a factor of some significance in Boston mayoral elections.⁸⁰ The British-American Association continued to grow throughout the fall campaign period of 1887. The branch in East Boston, for example, organized and elected John Benson as president. They started out with thirty-five members and reached a total of one hundred and twelve by the middle of October.⁸¹ By 1888 there were fifty-five such branches.⁸² Ethnic rivalries and fears combined with partisan politics to produce the school crisis of these years, and the Republican Party of Massachusetts found the school controversy “an irresistible temptation.”⁸³

The *Pilot* explicitly connected the politics of the Irish question in Boston with matters in Britain and Ireland. It argued in 1887 that local British American activities were part of a larger plot, stating that the Tory party in Britain had spent the mid-1880s “stirring up race and creed passions in Ireland. This British and Orange movement in Boston is another of their malevolently stupid efforts.”⁸⁴

The anti-Catholic and anti-Irish movement of the late 1880s began to coalesce in 1887 over the issues of Irish influence in local politics and

Irish American agitation over Home Rule for Ireland. Irish political power on the local level and the continued enthusiasm for anti-British movements aroused the British Americans of Boston and caused them to assert themselves. In 1887 Mayor Hugh O'Brien became the focus for a Yankee Protestant attack. The fact that the opposition to O'Brien was poorly organized is the largest factor in explaining O'Brien's reelection victory in 1887. The British Protestant backlash removed O'Brien from office a year later, though, and retarded the Irish control of politics.

Many people largely equate Boston political culture with Boston Irish attitudes toward the game of politics. Such imprecise (indeed erroneous) understanding of political culture is something that Ronald P. Formisano recently warned against: "Historians could benefit from emulating political scientists' greater rigor in identifying the political cultures that they discuss and in recognizing the inherent comparativeness of the concept."⁸⁵ Formisano asserts that "the logic of political culture is always comparative, whether its unit of measure is a city, state, region, class, group, or nation." And he laments that too often the "political culture of a spatial unit is invoked as explanation with no suggestion of how its culture resembles/differs from similar cities, states, or nations."

When looking at Boston politics, all too often the assumption is made that it is *sui generis*. The Boston Irish are celebrated or bemoaned for the uniqueness of their political culture, but a deeper analysis of the Irish part of the tradition indicates the need to place local political culture in a larger context. In part, Boston Irish politics needs to be considered in the context of Ireland's ill-fated struggle for Home Rule. Such an analysis of Boston also indicates the need to look at so-called British Americans and to take them seriously as an ethnic group. Whether of English, Scottish, or Welsh background, self-styled British Americans were a significant part of Boston politics.

Notes

1. Kerby Miller shows that appalling famine statistics alone do not explain the hatred of England engendered by the famine and argues that the disintegration of personal relationships and social dislocations in this period meant that survivors sought an explanation that would project blame on outsiders. Miller asserts, furthermore, that Catholic clergy and nationalist politicians formed these feelings into a powerful weapon against the traditional antagonist, En-

gland. Kerby Miller, "‘Revenge for Skibbereen’: Irish Emigration and the Meaning of the Great Famine," in *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*, ed. Arthur Gribben (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 181, 185.

While the famine may have provided a new animus, Mary P. Ryan observes that "nationalist politics and its flipside, anti-British sentiment, were always a staple of Irish-American journalism." Ryan argues that Irish immigrant associations were "first of all an act of cultural resistance, a counterforce to the experience of discrimination and virulent nativism." Furthermore, on one level, "the ethnic partitions of cities such as New York were constructed in the space between an Old World culture and New World discrimination." Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 80. It may also be noted that belonging to a political party gave people a sense of community, "an internalized sense of history, tradition and common values." Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 216.

2. David Brundage, "‘In Time of Peace, Prepare for War’: Key Themes in the Social Thought of New York’s Irish Nationalists, 1890–1916," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Timothy J. Meagher and Ronald H. Bayor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 322–23. Also, Brian Jenkins states that Fenianism was spent by 1871 and that in the 1870s Irish Americans were more concerned with the economic depression than the situation back in Ireland. See Brian Jenkins, *Fenians and Anglo-American Relations during Reconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 320.

3. Even the cautious Roman Catholic hierarchy in Ireland was co-opted by the movement when "as on other occasions in Irish history, the Church adroitly changed its footing to follow the way its flock was going." R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 418. Or, as Conor Cruise O’Brien puts it, the church handled nationalism with "constructive ambiguity," which profited from Irish Catholic nationalists in Westminster yet maintained its own imperial leanings. *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 26.

Some years later William O’Connell, cardinal archbishop of Boston, demonstrated a similar "ambiguity," as James M. O’Toole notes in his biography of the prelate. O’Connell gave a rousing speech on Ireland’s cause at Madison Square Garden in December 1918 but during the same period sent a quiet personal message to the British ambassador clarifying his intentions. O’Connell wished to make it known that "he wishes no ill to England and that he is forced to use vigorous language in order to retain control of the forces that he is attempting to lead." See *Militant and Triumphant: William Henry O’Connell and the Catholic Church in Boston, 1859–1944* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 233–34.

4. Despite the rejection of the 1886 Home Rule Bill, "Irish nationalists did not gravitate toward the more militant physical force philosophy of the Irish Republican Brotherhood," largely due to "the respect and confidence which Gladstone and Parnell inspired." Thomas E. Hachey, *Britain and Irish Separatism: From the Fenians to the Free State* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 28.

5. John Stuart Mill warned his fellow parliamentarians in 1868 of the danger of Irish American influence on British politics, noting that "the discontent in Ireland rests on a background of several millions of Irish across the Atlantic." He continued, their power will "daily increase; and is there any probability that the American-Irish will come to hate this country less than they do at the present moment?" J. S. Mill, *The Irish Land Question* (III-12), quoted in Nicholas Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 275.

6. Kerby Miller, in his landmark study, *Emigrants and Exiles*, underlines the necessity of transatlantic history when he writes: "One cannot study modern Ireland without realizing the central importance of massive, sustained emigration; nor should we write about Irish-America without recognizing the significance of the Irish background in shaping the emigrants' reactions to the New World." See Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

In *Atlantic Crossings*, Daniel T. Rodgers argues that the United States of the nineteenth century "cannot be understood outside the North Atlantic economy of which it was a part." See Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 2. Rodgers's interest is social policy in the Progressive era, and he stresses the need to look beyond the national borders in studying historical experience. In Rodgers's account, the Irish cultural revival and the Irish experience in tenant purchases of land play a minuscule part, but the point is that Miller, Rodgers, and other historians in the late twentieth century blazed the path in looking at the transatlantic interaction of social forces and ideas. They demonstrated the need to place local history in not only the national but also the international, transatlantic context. They help us understand that issues beyond local and national borders had meaning and meanings for the people of the past.

Boston College historian Kevin Kenny offers a model of such a search for meaning in his 1998 book, which focuses on the Irish experience in northeastern Pennsylvania. Kenny contextualizes the story of the anthracite region in the 1860s and 1870s, explaining, "The starting point for understanding the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania is the history of the Irish landholding, agrarian violence, and emigration, along with the economic and social development of the Pennsylvania anthracite region in the nineteenth century." Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.

Similarly, Terry Golway placed Knights of Labor leader (and Scranton,

Pennsylvania, mayor) Terence V. Powderly's career at "the intersection of Irish nationalism with the broader currents of American life" in *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight for Irish Freedom* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 105. Powderly was also national treasurer of the Clan na Gael.

7. Benson argued that "ethnic and religious differences have tended to be relatively the most important source of political differences in the United States." Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 165.

8. Robert P. Swierenga, "Ethnoreligious Political Behavior in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Voting, Values, Cultures," in *Religion and American Politics from the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford, 1990), 147.

9. Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 23-24.

10. Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 197. Also see Timothy J. Meagher's *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1928* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) on Worcester, Massachusetts, for recent scholarship on ethnicity.

11. David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 174.

12. Barbara Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 44.

13. *Pilot* (Boston), April 16, 1887.

14. *Boston Globe*, March 17, 1887.

15. Michael T. Isenberg insightfully observes that the Boston Irish "victories at the ballot box were a continuous and ironic reminder of their difficulties in everyday life." *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 41-42. On the other hand, Mark Wahlgren Summers warns us not to overestimate Irish political strength in America at large. He points out, the "Irish vote was more than myth but less than monolith." See *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 210.

16. *Pilot*, January 8, 1887.

17. See Lawrence W. Kennedy, "Boston's First Irish Mayor: Hugh O'Brien, 1885-1889," in *Massachusetts Politics: Selected Historical Essays*, ed. Jack Tager, Martin Kaufman, and Michael F. Konig (Westfield, Mass.: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, 1998), 128-52.

18. Arthur Mann, *Yankee Reformers in the Urban Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1954), 27.

19. Robert Cross, "Irish-American Leadership," in *Ethnic Leadership in America*, ed. John Higham (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 185.

20. Rowland Tappan Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America: 1790-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 186.
21. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 441.
22. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 28.
23. Paul Kleppner, "From Party to Factions: The Dissolution of Boston's Majority Party, 1876-1908," in *Boston, 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, ed. Ronald P. Formisano and Constance E. Burns (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 120.
24. *Pilot*, April 25, 1885.
25. Thomas H. O'Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 147; Shaun O'Connell, *Imagining Boston: A Literary Landscape* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 116.
26. Mark R. Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow: 1890-1920* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 168.
27. Geoffrey Blodgett, *The Gentle Reformers: Massachusetts Democrats in the Cleveland Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 54.
28. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 27, 46.
29. Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 38-39.
30. *Pilot*, August 8, 1885.
31. William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 134-35.
32. *Pilot*, October 17 and 24, 1885.
33. *Pilot*, April 17, 1886.
34. *Pilot*, July 17, 1886.
35. *Pilot*, April 9, 1887.
36. *Pilot*, June 4, 1887.
37. Victoria herself was of course a symbol. By the time of this jubilee "the new image of monarchy transformed the queen from the unpopular head of an outmoded aristocracy to a symbol of the nation and the empire, uniting all classes in Britain and the subject nations in a feudal-style entity, whose grandeur asserted Britain's superiority." Liz Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to Partition* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994), 147.
38. For more on this, see Lawrence W. Kennedy, "Pulpits and Politics: Anti-Catholicism in Boston in the 1880s and 1890s," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 28 (winter 2000): 56-75.
39. *Boston Herald*, November 7, 1887.
40. *Pilot*, June 18, 1887.
41. Anti-British nationalism was not, however, exclusively an Irish phenomenon. According to one historian it "represented a fairly widespread emotional and psychological response to Great Britain as the nation that presented most of the obstacles and frustrations encountered by the United States in its drive for marketplace hegemony." Edward P. Crapol, *America for Americans: Economic*

Nationalism and Anglophobia in the Late Nineteenth Century (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 87.

42. *Pilot*, September 22, 1860.

43. "Irish workers and many middle-class Irish allies believed that the Orangemen symbolized the oppression they had known in Ireland and that the Orange principles would help subvert republicanism and 'Anglo-Saxonize' America at the same time that industrialization was causing class lines to harden." Michael A. Gordon, *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

44. See, for example, *Pilot*, August 21, 1886.

45. Donald H. Akenson, *Small Differences, Irish Catholics, and Irish Protestants, 1815-1922: An International Perspective* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 144.

46. Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America*, 186.

47. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 441.

48. *Pilot*, May 22, 1886.

49. *Pilot*, October 23, 1886.

50. *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 21, 1887.

51. *Transcript* and *Globe*, June 21, 1887.

52. *Transcript*, June 21, 1887.

53. *Pilot*, July 9, 1887.

54. *Globe*, June 21, 1887.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Transcript*, June 21, 1887. O'Reilly claimed that he was "just out for a stroll" and came upon the meeting quite accidentally.

57. *Transcript*, June 21, 1887.

58. *Globe*, June 21, 1887.

59. James Jeffrey Roche, *John Boyle O'Reilly: His Life, Poems, and Speeches* (New York: Mershon Company, 1891), 307.

60. *Transcript*, June 21, 1887.

61. *Globe*, June 22, 1887.

62. *Transcript*, June 22, 1887.

63. Richard Harmond, "Tradition and Change in the Gilded Age: A Political History of Massachusetts, 1878-1893" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), 65.

64. *Pilot*, July 30, 1887.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Pilot*, August 6, 1887.

67. *Faneuil Hall: Who Are Its Conservators?* (Boston: British-American Association, 1887), 1-3.

68. *Ibid.*, 3.

69. *Ibid.*, 5.

70. *Ibid.*, 9.

71. *Ibid.*, 22.
72. *Ibid.*, 14.
73. These authors also encouraged free schools and opposed any state support of sectarian schools. *Faneuil Hall*, 4, 59, 64.
74. *Ibid.*, 64.
75. Alvin Packer Stauffer, "Anti-Catholicism in American Politics, 1865-1900" (Ph.D diss., Harvard University, 1933), 256.
76. *Pilot*, July 16, 1887.
77. *Pilot*, July 23, 1887.
78. See, for example, Richard D. Brown and Jack Tager, *Massachusetts: A Concise History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 217, and Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward F. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 3 vols. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 3:101.
79. Stauffer, "Anti-Catholicism," 103.
80. Peter K. Eisinger, "Ethnic Political Transition in Boston, 1884-1933: Some Lessons for Contemporary Cities," *Political Science Quarterly* 93 (1978): 224.
81. *Globe*, October 12, 1887.
82. John T. Galvin, "The Dark Ages of Boston Politics," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 89 (1977): 101.
83. Richard Harmond, "Troubles of Massachusetts Republicans During the 1880s," *Mid-America* 56 (1974): 97.
84. *Pilot*, August 13, 1887.
85. Ronald P. Formisano, "The Concept of Political Culture," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (winter 2001): 424.

Contested Bodies and Souls
Immigrant Converts in Boston, 1890–1940



KRISTEN A. PETERSEN

ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON in late May any year between 1916 and 1939, Boston's Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Cross hummed with activity as a capacity crowd of nearly 4,000 people witnessed the confirmation of the archdiocese's converts.¹ Each year 800 to 1,000 converts from parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Boston traveled to the cathedral to be formally welcomed into the Church. They represented all walks of life. They were rich professionals, and they were laborers. There were Americans and immigrants of all races—Chinese, black, Native American—and of all ethnicities. They were young adults—some just out of adolescence—they were the newly married, and they were grandparents. And they were nearly equally divided between men and women. On this day they were all Roman Catholics regardless of their origins, class, and prior religious affiliations.² The *Pilot* proclaimed that the scene “testif[ied] eloquently to the wonderful vigor and expansion of the Church in the Boston Archdiocese.”³ In no other way did the archdiocese mount such a public display of the growth and splendor of the Roman Catholic Church in Boston.⁴

The Archdiocese of Boston was not the only religious body that annually welcomed new members. Baptisms of the newly converted occurred in most, if not all, of Boston's churches each year, especially in the spring. For Protestants, too, there was reason to celebrate. New members—converts—filled emptying pews in existing downtown churches. By the turn of the century all of Boston's Protestant denominations had turned their attention to seeking converts from among the city's newest residents. While most converts in Boston-area churches were Americans, to Protestants already infused with reform and mission-minded

endeavors, the conversion of immigrants represented not only their individual salvation but also their salvation from foreignness. By saving immigrants, Protestants argued, they could also save Boston and the United States from foreign (especially Catholic) perversion. "The churches in America are the melting pot whence must emerge the new American," reported a representative of the Massachusetts Baptist Society in 1911.⁵ But immigrant converts were not simply the result of proselytizing.

Many immigrants realized that in America they had choices about how and where to worship. A change in church affiliation represented awareness of freedom of worship, but it also signified a choice about how to live in America and what role traditional family, religious, and communal structures would play. Conversion was one of many strategies used by immigrants for accommodating themselves to life in a new world.

There is no question that in Boston between 1880 and the 1930s conversion of immigrants was not an uncommon phenomenon. The evidence is in the numbers of missions and ethnic convert churches that dotted Boston's landscape during the period—a total of more than 115.⁶ In each neighborhood in Boston, Protestant missionaries and churches established missions to immigrants. The result was that in each ethnic community there was a choice of where to worship; for example, Italians in the North End who were already divided between two Catholic national (ethnolinguistic) parishes could also choose to attend neighborhood Episcopal, Congregational, Methodist, or Baptist missions. Likewise, the city's Swedes found alternatives to the Lutheran Church available in Baptist, Episcopal, and Congregational churches. The pews of the Italian Congregational Church of the North End, St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church, and the Chiesa dell'Evangelo (Methodist) of Boston (to name just a few of the city's mission churches) were filled with immigrant converts.

Public and published records of immigrant conversions in Boston-area churches reveal significant common characteristics. Whether Roman Catholic, Baptist, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, or Methodist, the names of the converts never made it into the pages of the various religious groups' publications. Only rarely were converts named publicly, and those who were identified were either members of the upper class or, inexplicably, they were Chinese immigrants.⁷ Instead, newspapers and denominational reports acknowledged the hard work and spiritual

diligence of the respective clergy and missionary women; in a way, the converts themselves stood merely as examples of the clergy's success.

Who were the immigrant converts? They were widows, among them Antonia Calarese, who left the Catholic Church and joined St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal Chapel in the North End. They were middle-class professionals, like Anthony Pisten, an insurance agent, who joined St. John's Roman Catholic Church, Roxbury. They were laborers, too, like carpenter Antonio Tamburino, who joined Church of Our Saviour (Italian Methodist) in South Boston, and pipe fitter John Sillen, a Swedish immigrant, who converted in the Swedish department of the Salvation Army. They were single folk and they were families, young adults and the elderly. They were newly arrived, and they were the children of immigrants.

If one were to take the public record to heart, one would believe that *who* the converts were mattered less than *what* they represented to the religious bodies they joined. There is more to the story than this, however. Should immigrant converts be categorized with other converts, or do their experiences necessitate construction of a separate typology? Identifying who the converts were gives voice and feature to those who would otherwise remain anonymous. Examples are drawn not only from Catholic and Baptist records, but also from those of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts and of individual Methodist and Congregational churches. While such characteristics as age, gender, marital status, death, and residential and employment environment share some features from immigrant to nonimmigrant, this analysis shows that peculiarities of the immigrant experience do indeed call for independent consideration.

Who Converts?

Analysis of sacramental records, city directories, and federal census schedules reveals important patterns en route to answering the question, Who converts among immigrants and their children in the early twentieth century?⁸ First, despite the findings of scholars of psychology and religion who, writing earlier in this century, claimed that the vast majority of converts were adolescents, conversion among Bostonians—Catholics, Protestants, immigrants, and native-born—was largely an experience of adulthood.⁹ Early-twentieth-century studies of converts

did not include immigrants. Second, there are distinct patterns of male and female conversions. Not only did conversion types differ by gender, but the intersection of gender and ethnicity created patterns within gender categories for each ethnic group. Third, a high percentage of conversions may be reliably connected to marriage. Some immigrants married out of their faith and ethnic community. This finding suggests that some conversions were less about spirituality than love, family lifestyle, and unity. Fourth, widows pepper new membership records across the religious spectrum. But, interestingly, the data also suggest a connection between the loss of a parent, not just a spouse, in the ability or interest of a person to seek a new religious affiliation. Fifth, converts often came into new churches as parts of family units—as married couples or spouses of converts or as siblings of converts. It was not unusual for siblings or a single parent (sometimes widowed) and child to convert together. Sixth, influences arose from close relationships with nonfamily members. Friends, coworkers, and employers compelled some people to attend new churches and to consider conversion.

The following discussion of immigrant convert characteristics and patterns is based on analysis of nearly 1,200 individuals, whose conversion data was compiled for this study.¹⁰ The facts suggest alternative interpretations of conversion in general and illustrate how the immigrant experience created a new type of convert and a typology that diverges from the model established by previous scholars.

Age as a Factor of Conversion

In 1905 the president of the Massachusetts Baptist Sunday School Association reported to the Massachusetts Baptist Convention that because conversion is both a spiritual and a “physiological phenomenon . . . it occurs most often when mind and body are being most rapidly developed.” Thus he concluded that “from ten to sixteen we have the plastic mind in a receptive state and fairly so until twenty. Beyond this experience shows that susceptibility to religious influence rapidly diminishes with the passing years.” Ultimately, he argued, “conversion in youth is God’s law of life.”¹¹ He had the statistics to support his claim. Just two years earlier he reported that “eighty percent of 800 Baptist converts experienced their conversions younger than age 20, less than three percent over 30.”¹² In 1915 the president of the Massachusetts Baptist Sun-

day School Association, Stephen Moore, bolstered these claims with fresh data. In his survey of 3,000 converts, he found that 77 percent converted at an age younger than twenty.¹³ E. D. Starbuck, whose 1899 survey of more than 1,200 converts in California and the Midwest is the most oft-cited work on the subject, found that "conversion is a distinctly adolescent phenomenon," occurring "almost exclusively" between the years of ten and twenty-five, and dropping off to negligible numbers after age thirty.¹⁴

Although denominational and sociological surveys from the turn of the century agree that most converts were adolescents, my study of converts—especially immigrant converts—in Boston during the same period found a much different result.¹⁵ A comparison of the total data pool of 1,147 Protestant and Catholic individuals to the 623 converts to Roman Catholicism within the pool shows that converts in each group averaged approximately 28.5 years of age.¹⁶ More than one-third (36 percent) of the converts to Catholicism during the period under study were between the ages of 20 and 33.¹⁷

While Catholic sacramental records contradict turn-of-the-century surveys, so too do records from other denominations. Of the remaining 524 converts in this survey (who were converts to Protestant denominations), teenagers represent less than .5 percent of converts. In fact the total sample replicates the findings for Catholics: the peak age for Protestant and Catholic converts was between 20 and 33 (32 percent), with most between the ages of 20 and 26. For example, at Holy Trinity German Roman Catholic Church in the South End, 110 people converted between 1902 and 1913; nearly three-quarters were over the age of 20.¹⁸

Among the possible explanations for the discrepancy between these findings and those of earlier studies are the ways in which denominations defined childhood, the varying rules regarding age of reason in order to experience conversion, the sample pools, and the immigrant experience itself. First, religious groups and sociologists defined childhood and age of reason differently. Who counts as a convert, the age at which conversion is accepted, and the age at which full membership is appropriate varied from denomination to denomination.¹⁹ Many denominations chose 16 as the transitional age. For Baptists, no one under 16 was perceived to have the mental capacity to fully understand and experience conversion. Likewise, Episcopalians determined that "members 16 years of age and over are to be considered adult members."²⁰ In contrast, the parish priests of the Archdiocese of Boston annotated their respective

baptismal registers with the phrase "neo converso" (new convert) only in the case of adults, people at least 18.²¹ To further complicate matters, sociologists from Boston University who surveyed Protestant work among immigrants in several Boston neighborhoods made the age cutoff for childhood 18, regardless of what age the denominations used.²²

Second, while most of Boston's churches deemed anyone 16 to 18 years of age and older as an adult in the eyes of God, in immigrant communities the majority of converts were well into adulthood when they made the choice to change religious affiliations. One explanation is simply the age at which immigrants came to the United States and the fact that many came first as single adults. Separated from families and in many cases living in communities without traditional churches and social structures, they were vulnerable to a range of influences. Most immigrant converts were thus at an age when the president of the Massachusetts Baptist Sunday School Association deemed most people's spiritual susceptibility to be so hardened that "nothing but fire and hammer can change it."²³ The following sections consider factors peculiar to the immigrant experience in urban centers, including gender, family status, and external social pressures.

The Gender of Conversion

Men and women converted for different reasons, and they exhibited different attractions and relationships to their churches. In addition, gender patterns varied between Catholics and Protestants, and among ethnic groups. Sociologist W. Seward Salisbury reported that, overall, Protestant women were most likely to convert, followed by Protestant men. However, he added, "It is only the *Protestant women* who convert at a significantly higher rate than *Catholic women*; *Protestant men* do not convert at a significantly higher rate than *Catholic men*."²⁴

Converts to Roman Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Boston were more likely to be male than they were to be female, regardless of ethnicity. Two-thirds of converts to Catholicism in Boston during this period were men. For example, 66 percent of converts at St. Francis de Sales were men, as compared to 59 percent at Holy Trinity (German). At St. Stephen's, in the North End, 83 percent of converts were men.²⁵

In contrast, Protestant denominations that reported membership by gender (in tables that only gave data for male members) show that

women predominated among the mainstream population. Just 45 percent of converts to the Episcopal Church in Boston were male in this period. Likewise, membership in Boston's Congregational churches was overwhelmingly dominated by women.²⁶ In many, but not all, immigrant convert churches, women consistently outnumbered men. For example, women exceeded men as converts often by a margin of three to one at all of the city's Congregational mission churches except one. Women dominated at both of the Armenian Congregational churches, at the Swedish Congregational Church, at the Norwegian Congregational Church, and at the French Congregational Church.²⁷ Women converts at St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church also outnumbered men. There, women accounted for 61 percent of converts.

This pattern held true for all the city's immigrants, except Italians. Individual Protestant churches for Italians reported that in most cases the number of male converts exceeded the number of women converts. Episcopal priest D. A. Rocca reported from the North End in 1904 that "a good congregation, largely composed of men, may be found at 9 every Sunday morning joining heartily in prayers and singing."²⁸ Once the Episcopal Diocese established St. Francis of Assisi Chapel for Italians in the North End, 58 percent of converts in the chapel were men.²⁹ The Italian Mission (Congregational) in the North End consistently reported a male membership that significantly outnumbered women members. This was the only Congregational church in Boston at which men outnumbered women.³⁰

Gender is an important analytical category in the study of immigrant conversions, but it is equally necessary to examine the intersection of gender and ethnicity. The different conversion patterns between men and women reflect the different relationships of the sexes to family and religion. Typically in the United States men held the primary leadership roles in churches, especially regarding financial and business matters and in determining activities, programs, and agendas. Sociologist W. Seward Salisbury found that "with males . . . the question of converting or not converting does not constitute a clash between sacred and traditional constraints as in the case of females. For a male to remain within his religion is responding to religious constraints, but it is also responding to the traditional norm that the husband as head of the house makes the basic decisions."³¹ For immigrant women, in particular, traditional churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church for Italians, reinforced Old World social mores and gender roles and was an extension of the

home spheres that they dominated. In the case of Italians, this was especially important.³² It was not uncommon in Italian immigrant households for Italian women to attend mass regularly—even daily—while their menfolk did not. Thus when it came to conversion, Italian Catholic women rarely left their churches.

In Boston's complex mission church scene, members of ethnic groups responded differently to alternative affiliations. A comparison of the records of St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal and St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal churches and of Our Saviour Italian Methodist Church show that Swedish women converted more often than did Italian women. The voluminous research on Italians in America validates these findings. Among southern Italians in the United States, women maintained a stronger, more devout relationship to the Catholic Church than did their male counterparts. A long history of antipathy toward the Catholic hierarchy in the old country predisposed Italian men to treat the Church and its representatives in the United States no differently than they had at home.³³ Certainly the fact that Italian men outnumbered women converts in two Protestant churches, Episcopal and Congregational, sets Italians apart from other ethnic groups in the study. However, one significant factor differentiates Italian and Swedish women. Italian women tended to arrive as members of family units, while Swedish women were more likely to be single and immigrating to find work.

Immigrant men and women converts shared significant experiences: peer and employer pressure in the workplace, lack of services in native language or faith of heritage, and isolation from family. However, differences far outweighed the similarities in Boston's ethnic communities.

Immigrant women's conversions tended to be motivated by their linguistic and social isolation in tenements, access to missionaries who canvassed their neighborhoods, and their marital status (either as widows or as spouses of intemperate men). Women tended to seek out new places of worship when their own church communities or pastors failed them in some way or when pressing material needs compelled them to seek assistance from any source. One Scottish immigrant woman named McDonald left her Protestant church for a nearby Catholic church when her pastor could or would not assist her materially after her husband died.³⁴ Boston's missionaries and clergy who visited women—mothers—in their tenement homes recognized their need for friendship and capitalized on it. Home visits and mothers' meetings were programs common to all of Boston's Protestant churches because they were the best way to reach immigrant, especially married, women.

Men's circumstances differed in a variety of ways. They were more likely than women to convert in order to marry, to be without family in the United States as migrant laborers (and birds of passage), and to live in bachelor communities like labor camps. While women were most often contacted in their homes, men encountered missionaries in the factories, labor camps, and businesses. There is also abundant evidence that employees of factories were approached and often pressured by fellow workers, supervisors, and factory owners to attend certain churches. When Italian men settled temporarily in labor camps in Boston's nearby suburbs of Quincy, Waltham, and Wakefield in the 1890s, mission-minded folk from local Protestant churches established a routine of weekly visits to bring religion to the laborers. Such an environment compelled Frank Gulinello to choose Presbyterianism while working in a Pennsylvania mine. After moving to Boston, he joined a nearby Italian Methodist church. Chinese men in Boston, who lived in a virtually womanless bachelor community, interacted with missionary women like Harriet Carter, who visited them regularly in their workplaces and invited them to attend Sunday school classes.³⁵

Men were also appealed to on political grounds. Some clergy, such as the Reverend Valdina, an Italian immigrant who became a Baptist minister in Quincy, capitalized on southern Italian men's traditional antipathy to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. In mission halls such clergy validated these immigrants' distrust of priests and the papacy and held up American Protestant faiths as a better choice because of their promise to be democratic and independent. For Poles and some Italians, renegade clergy used socialist propaganda and also resentment against Irish and German Americans, whom they believed controlled the Catholic Church in America, to entice immigrant men into alternative churches.³⁶ Thus primary characteristics of the male experience included isolation from family and the offer of community from American women (in particular), politics, and the pressure of an employer to join his church.

Single, Married, or Widowed: Conversion and Marital Relationships

Just as the relationship between gender and ethnicity is important to understanding immigrant conversions, so too is it important to understanding the ways in which urban religious and sociocultural heterogeneity altered family and ethnic cohesiveness and marriage patterns. In tight-knit ethnic communities, like those surrounding the North End's

two Italian Catholic parishes, sacramental records emphasize the insularity of the communities through the preponderance of marriages between parish members.³⁷ The increasing ethnic heterogeneity of the neighborhoods, however, ate away at the boundaries of established communities. All of Boston's immigrant neighborhoods were heterogeneous; pluralism was inescapable. One could live in the South End and be a part of a Swedish Lutheran church community but attend English classes at the local settlement house with Italians, Poles, French Canadians, and Syrians, and work in a factory that employed workers from a plethora of origins. In fact the national parish or ethnic church was one of the very few places that immigrants could be surrounded by only their kind. Immigrants tolerated and accommodated to heterogeneity of ethnicity and religion in their tenements, schools, social agencies, and workplaces. Such intermingling inevitably produced interethnic marriages. Many of these interethnic or interfaith marriages resulted in changes in religious affiliation.

Edward T. Bigham, the son of Danish immigrants Soren Henry and Anna G. Bigham, grew up in an ethnically mixed neighborhood in the Boston suburb of Waltham. The family did not belong to either of the city's two Swedish churches (there was a Lutheran church and a Covenant Congregational church); rather, the Bighams and their five children attended the Second Congregational Church on Main Street. When Edward returned from a tour of service during World War I, he rekindled a friendship with his Irish Catholic neighbor Hazel Brennen. Friendship soon turned to love, and Edward was shocked when Hazel told him that she could not marry him because he was not Catholic. In earnest, Edward asked her what he could do to make it possible for them to marry, and she answered that he needed to receive instruction in Catholicism. He converted to Catholicism in 1919 at the age of twenty-one, just three days before the couple married.³⁸ As a family the Bighams were devout (the Bigham children attended parochial schools and Boston College), but none more so than Edward. While his decision to convert and to raise a Catholic family alienated him and his children from several of his siblings, his faith and commitment never wavered.³⁹

Edward Bigham's decision to convert illustrates one of the most dramatic patterns arising from the church records surveyed. A significant number of converts to Catholicism married a Catholic in the church of their conversion within weeks (sometimes hours) of the conversion ceremony.⁴⁰ Twice as many converts to Catholicism did so because of

impending marriage, as compared to this study's total sample of Catholic and Protestant converts. At St. Francis de Sales Church, in Roxbury, for example, 32 out of 109 converts married at that church within one year of the date of conversion. Of these, 20, or two-thirds, married a Catholic within one week of the conversion ceremony. These results compare favorably to research on Catholic converts and intermarriage conducted throughout the twentieth century, thus suggesting a constant behavioral pattern. For example, in his 1950s study of Catholic converts in twenty-three of Louisiana's urban parishes, Joseph Fichter found that fully 75 percent of the adult converts "came to the church in connection with interfaith marriages."⁴¹ However, two-thirds of men who converted to Catholicism in this study's sample did so in order to marry, as opposed to one-third of women.⁴²

The reason for these numbers is unclear. The Roman Catholic Church was the only religious body to require a written promise from non-Catholics that they would not impede their Catholic spouses' desire to raise their children in the Church; thus interfaith marriage was technically acceptable without conversion. The more likely source of influence may have been the intended spouse and her parents. A significant number of converts who married Catholics had their fiancées' family members witness both the conversion and the marriage ceremonies. The case of the Franzell sisters, Wanda and Clara, illustrates the intersection of marriage and family in making the decision to convert. Twenty-nine-year-old German immigrant Wanda Franzell was raised in a German Lutheran home. When she met her husband Francis Fein, he was a clerk who worked downtown and lived with his German Catholic family in Roxbury. The Feins were members of Holy Trinity German Catholic Church. In 1904, after Frank proposed to Wanda, she made the decision to convert. She did not make the decision alone; her older sister Clara, who had been married in Holy Trinity in 1899 to Henry Wagner, decided to join the Church as well. Wanda converted to Catholicism at Holy Trinity on November 14, 1904, just one week before she married Francis Fein. Her future sister-in-law, Maria Fein, served as godparent or witness to the conversion. When Clara converted three days later, Wanda's widowed mother-in-law, Caroline Fein, witnessed the ceremony.⁴³

What about converts to Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal churches? Are there such pronounced correlations between marriage and conversion there as well? These cases are more complicated for a number of reasons. The training period required prior to being received as a convert

and member varied according to denomination. Methodists, for example, enrolled potential converts in probationer classes. The duration of the course of study typically lasted for more than a year. In the meantime, probationers participated in church services and social activities. Anyone could attend Baptist services, but only those received as full members could partake of communion. Thus marriage and baptismal records reveal only rare cases of a clear relationship between marriage and conversion.

Membership records of First Swedish Baptist Church, now Calvary Baptist Church of Dorchester, offer examples that illustrate significant differences between immigrant Catholic and Protestant converts. There, records show that when marriages took place close to the time when people were baptized into the church, more time lapsed between events than in the case of the linked Catholic marriages and conversions. In one case, H. P. and Eda M. Hanson married eight months after H. P. was baptized and received into the church of which Eda had already been a member for several years.⁴⁴

It was not uncommon for religion to divide couples and families. Protestant and Catholic church records indicate that spouses did not always convert together. Usually Catholic wives retained their allegiance after their husbands joined Protestant churches. Antonio Tamburino was received as a probationer to the Italian Methodist Church of Our Saviour along with his daughter, Josephine, in April 1924. By 1930 all four of Tamburino's daughters were members of the church, but his wife, Emanuela, remained absent from the membership rolls.⁴⁵ Likewise Francis Mazzeo's father belonged to the Italian Methodist Church of Our Saviour, in South Boston, while his wife and children attended an Italian Catholic church in the North End.⁴⁶

That there was a link between marriage and conversion is obvious from the evidence above. Dissatisfaction and family dysfunction alienated some immigrants from their families and ultimately from their churches of heritage. Sociologist-historian Dean Hoge found that "intermarried persons . . . are likely to have felt dissatisfaction with parents and with family relationships, to have had a strifeful family life, and to have been emancipated from their parents at the time of marriage."⁴⁷ These findings may help to explain conversions among working-class and immigrant people in Boston earlier in the century. The immigration experience may have produced similar results by leaving a void that familial relationships once filled. Thus when Wanda Franzell fell in love

with Frank Fein, she became a part of his family in a most profound way by joining his family's faith community. In cases such as these, converts constructed new families and communities through marriage.

The Converted Family

Families came into new churches in several ways. They came as nuclear units, as siblings, and in chain migration patterns. The Malvestra family of Quincy, Massachusetts, found no Italian-speaking priest when they moved to Quincy's Wollaston neighborhood in the 1920s.⁴⁸ Instead they found an active Italian Baptist church and an enthusiastic Italian-speaking pastor. They decided that it was more important for the family to be a part of an Italian community than to be a part of an American Catholic community in the absence of an Italian Catholic community.

The experiences of Italian Baptists in Wakefield, Massachusetts, illustrate one of the ways in which families came to convert. When Italians first came to Wakefield in 1901 to work on a sewer construction project, members of the town's First Baptist Church welcomed them. Many of the workers were married and had left their wives and families behind in Boston while they worked in temporary jobs. When projects were completed, some of them decided to settle in the less populous suburb of Boston rather than in congested Italian enclaves of the North End or East Boston. They brought their families to Wakefield and into the Italian Baptist mission with them; there was no Italian-speaking priest in Wakefield at the time. Baptists won them to the faith by being neighborly and offering spiritual camaraderie. The church's historian, whose father had been one of those workers, wrote, "The weekly attendance grew, since [the] ministers were magnetic preachers, and soon some of the women joined their husbands at these services."⁴⁹

Conversions of family members resembled kinship migration network patterns. As with Wakefield's Italian residents, it was not uncommon for one member of the family, either a child or a parent, to become involved with a new church and, as a result, attract other family members. But these tendencies were also affected by the stage in the migration process of the ethnic group. For example, membership records at two Swedish convert churches (St. Ansgarius and Boston's Swedish Congregational Church) show that during the decade of the 1890s, when

Swedish migration to New England was only in its second decade, the majority of new members were single men and women.⁵⁰

However, by the decade after the turn of the century, as the migration flow matured and more families migrated, and as immigrants established families, the nuclear family came to dominate new membership in these churches. Sometimes a married couple entered membership together, bringing their young children into the church community with them. After 1900, one-quarter of the new converts to St. Ansgarius were already married when they joined the church, while one-third of the people who joined St. Francis of Assisi were already married.⁵¹ Six members of the Italian Donadio family joined St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Chapel in 1915 and in 1923, four on June 20, 1915, and two on April 22, 1923. Gaetano Donadio, twenty-three, and his fiancée, Luccia Giannino, eighteen, were confirmed together in June and married the following October. Gaetano's twenty-one-year-old cousin Pasquale was also confirmed that day. Pasquale married Rosa Oliviero in 1922, and she joined the church fifteen months later. Pasquale and Rosa stood as godparents to another Donadio convert, Sarah.⁵²

It was also not uncommon to find siblings converting together. In a similar case to that of siblings Wanda and Clara Franzell, the Krauth brothers further illustrate this point. In 1906, when twenty-one-year-old William Krauth converted to Catholicism at Holy Trinity German Catholic Church, Jacob and Elizabeth Eiker stood as witnesses to the event. Five years later, in October 1911, the members of the Eiker family returned to Holy Trinity, but this time on behalf of William and his brother Carl. On October 17, Emma Eiker and her brother Joseph witnessed Carl's conversion, and one week later, William married Emma there.⁵³ These cases illustrate an important aspect of immigrant conversions: the conversions often were not isolated events, nor did they exemplify the typical model of religious awakening defined by William James during the period.⁵⁴ Rather, they represented the forging of new relationships and communities.

Death and the Convert

There is a peculiar relationship between death and conversion. Life-threatening illnesses are known for compelling people to convert or to recant a conversion and attempt to rejoin the original faith. Faced with

the imminence of death, some people took stock of their spiritual circumstance and made changes to try to find peace and assurance of a "place" to go after death.

In Boston, clergymen performed baptismal ceremonies in hospitals to initiate the ailing children of mixed marriages into the faith of one or the other parent. Catholic women who had married Protestants in non-Catholic ceremonies, especially, found their children's health crises reason enough to return to Catholicism and bring their children with them. In these cases, the threat of death gave new strength to latent ethnoreligious loyalties and beliefs. Dire circumstances also attracted converts. During the 1918 influenza epidemic, the threat of death made its mark among patients in hospitals. One Chinese immigrant, on the occasion of his second hospitalization, asked the hospital chaplain to baptize him. He explained that he thought "it was better to get all cleaned up inside," in case he did not recover.⁵⁵

In contrast, death seems also to have loosened ethnoreligious and familial ties in some immigrant conversion cases. This project's survey reveals conversion patterns among surviving family members. First, many converts had lost a father prior to their conversion and (or) their marriage to someone of another faith. This project uncovered fifteen examples of converts who lived with a widowed parent or who had lost a parent recently. In five of sixty cases in which marriage and conversion ceremonies occurred within short time periods, the convert had lost a father.⁵⁶ Edwin Robinson was forty-four in 1911 and had recently lost his father when he converted at St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church. He married Katherine Curry the next day.⁵⁷ When Victor Alberti and Mabel Breslin married in the spring of 1913, both their mothers were widows. Victor's mother was a German immigrant and raised her two sons as marginal Protestants. As adults both men chose to become Catholics. His brother Oscar converted first, and Victor joined St. Leo Roman Catholic Church two weeks before his wedding there.⁵⁸

Second, many older converts were widows or widowers. The widow phenomenon surfaced in several important ways for both Roman Catholic converts and converts to the Episcopal immigrant churches. For example, Karolina Nordstrom, a Swedish Lutheran, lost her husband in May of 1904. Eleven months later the fifty-year-old widow joined St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church, bringing her three children with her.⁵⁹ Widows and widowers who remarried often brought their new spouses into convert churches. Antonia Patti Calarese came to St. Fran-

cis of Assisi Episcopal Chapel in a roundabout way. When her husband, Antonio Patti, died in 1915 of heart failure at age fifty-five, his funeral was at Christ Church, an Episcopal church in the North End. Antonia was not a member. Ten months after Patti died, his widow married a widower, Mario Calarese. The couple joined St. Francis of Assisi four months after they wed.⁶⁰

Death of a spouse or of a parent may have worked in any of several ways to make it possible for someone to change religious affiliations. Despair and lack of comfort from one's affiliation or clergyman is just one reason. Death of a significant family member, especially of a husband or father, may have loosened one's ties to church, community, or a certain lifestyle. Once the family's familial and cultural authority figure was gone, adult children may have felt few obstacles left to marriages outside the faith. Older widows and widowers who converted upon remarriage may have felt that they had fulfilled ethnoreligious obligations by marrying and raising a family in their original faith. Friendship and comfort offered by members of another church may have drawn the grieving person in.

While death may have made it possible for some people to consider a change in religious affiliation or to have a conversion experience, the question of the burial of the converted illustrates the spiritual and familial conflicts of such a change. For many, conversion was an isolating experience. It was not uncommon for a change in affiliation to cause family discord, as in the Bigham family. Examples gleaned from interviews and from parish correspondence files suggest, however, that family members preferred that the deceased convert be buried with family rather than alone in a cemetery belonging to the convert's chosen church. For Catholics, families of converts petitioned the archdiocese to allow a grave in a family's Protestant cemetery to be consecrated so that the convert might lie with family members without violating the sacraments of his chosen faith. In other cases, converts themselves requested that their bodies be returned to their homeland for burial in ancient family plots. Joseph Sundin, a convert to the Baptist faith in Massachusetts, requested that he be buried in the family plot of his village's Lutheran church in Sweden.⁶¹ The desire for family reunification in perpetuity and the spiritual promise of a tested faith sometimes outweighed relationships established in a new faith and community.

Conversion and the Workplace

The home of Episcopal Bishop William A. Lawrence, his wife, Julia, and their seven children, at 122 Commonwealth Avenue, included a retinue of nine servants, three of whom hailed from Sweden.⁶² In 1909 two of these young women—Alida Hilma Johansson and Anna Holst—converted to the Episcopal Church while in the bishop's employ. Alida was twenty-two, an immigrant who had arrived in Boston in 1907. Anna was twenty-one and had arrived in 1905. They did not attend services at the bishop's church, the Episcopal cathedral on Tremont Street; rather they became members of St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church.⁶³ Up and down Commonwealth Avenue and at other exclusive Back Bay addresses, Swedish maids and kitchen workers found an alternative to Immanuel Swedish Lutheran Church in the South End. Instead, they joined St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church at 777 Shawmut Avenue in Roxbury. Between 1900 and 1915, twenty-eight Swedish women who worked in Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street homes, alone, joined St. Ansgarius. Fully three-quarters of these women were in their twenties and thirties, all were single, and most appear to have been career domestics.⁶⁴

The introduction of Episcopalianism into the lives of resident domestics from Sweden most likely came from two influential sources: employers and coworkers. It was not unusual that employers encouraged or even pressured their employees to embrace their faiths. While employers of domestics held a powerful position as coresidents, factory owners also influenced the lives of their employees.⁶⁵

Historians who describe paternalistic mill owners and their efforts to mold a workforce to suit social and moral ideals—and to emulate a Protestant work ethic—often ignore the influence of mill owners in the religious lives of their workers. At the Boston Manufacturing Company (BMC) in Waltham, Massachusetts, mill owners permitted, if not encouraged, workers to meet at the mill to organize their own churches; they also provided seed money or the land to help immigrant workers build their churches. This was the case for Swedish immigrants in the 1880s and for Italians after the turn of the century.⁶⁶ In Wakefield Italian workers were pressured to join their employer's faith. There, the owner of L. B. Evans Shoe Factory, himself an active Baptist, hired many Italians once the town's sewer project that brought them to Wakefield was

complete. Harvey B. Evans persuaded one of his tenants, an Italian Baptist missionary named Arnaldo Nartino, to undertake mission work among the Italians camped in town. Evans funded Nartino's work and was himself an active proselytizer among his new employees. Church historian Josephine Sardella, whose father worked for Evans, described the climate. "These men were not churchgoers, although they considered themselves Catholics, and they had no desire to go to a Protestant church," she wrote. "However, since Mr. Evans was the owner of the factory, and it was good to be looked upon favorably by 'the boss,' they decided to attend."⁶⁷ Evans's workers became the foundation of Wakefield's Italian Baptist Church.⁶⁸

The workplace not only allowed many immigrants the opportunity to explore their independence by living away from family, but it also allowed friends and coworkers to assume influential if not familial roles. Friendships helped those who were living away from family to redefine themselves socially and to fill social and familial voids. Coworkers, roommates, and friends influenced many converts' choices. Conversion records show roommates converting together, including coworkers like Hilma Johansson and Anna Holst. Another domestic worker, Ingrid Willman, was just seventeen when she came to Boston from Sweden in 1908. She took a job on Beacon Street in the home of Lester Leland, a business executive, where her sister, Augusta, was a cook. Ingrid was one of seven servants, most of whom were Swedish. The Lelands' cook, Anna Johansson, joined St. Ansgarius Church the year that Ingrid arrived in the house. Ingrid converted in St. Ansgarius Church two years later, but her sister never joined St. Ansgarius.⁶⁹

Conclusion

On Memorial Day, 1917, Ethelynd Hawley Briscoe and her fourteen-year-old daughter, Margaret Briscoe, joined nearly a thousand other converts in Boston's Cathedral of the Holy Cross to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. That same year, Pasqualina Zarelli Lariccia and her husband, Luigi Giuseppe Lariccia, left the Catholic Church and joined St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Chapel in the North End. They brought their thirteen-year-old daughter, Angelina, into the church with them and reared three more children as Episcopalians. Eventually seven members of the Lariccia family in Boston converted at St. Francis.⁷⁰

We may never be able to say with certainty what compelled people like the Lariccias to convert, since so little qualitative information about their lives has surfaced. They do, however, represent distinctive aspects of an immigrant convert typology. Some immigrants responded to mission outreach and availed themselves of new faith opportunities once removed from their homelands. For others, the absence of familial and communal obligations and traditions in some cases made it possible for immigrants to remain churchless or to choose a new church. For young women like Ingrid Willman, the need for a community and the influences of coworkers may have eroded religious boundaries that may already have been weakened by the process of migration. Like the Malvestra family, many other immigrants may have felt it was more important to find a sympathetic or welcoming ethnic community than to find a traditional church community. Of utmost importance to many immigrants was the availability of foreign-language-speaking clergy.

Immigrants who converted to American Protestant denominations in Boston included people of all faiths and ethnicities. While converts' individual characteristics varied by age, gender, marital, and familial status, the categories of analysis described here cannot incorporate the many peculiar factors at play in the choice of each individual convert. For immigrants and their children, conversion was both a response to a new environment and symbolic of an internal reorganization or resocialization. For them, a change in religious affiliation was one way to accommodate to an environment so dramatically different from the Old World. Thus the conversions described here reflect choices that were motivated by the need to resolve practical issues of cultural environment, geography, language, love, community, and poverty. Sometimes conversion was an act of rebellion, and sometimes it was an attempt to find a religious community that filled a void that one's own "traditional" church could not. Protestant missionaries and clergy congratulated foreign-born converts for choosing a surer path to Americanization at the same time that they opened their hearts to Christ. To these people, the process of becoming an American Protestant Christian was inextricably linked to the process of assimilation and, ultimately, of becoming an American.

Notes

1. "Over 1,000 Converts Confirmed at Cathedral," *Pilot* (Boston), 16 May 1926, 1.

2. "Each pastor . . . will send . . . a list containing the names of such converts a month before Pentecost, and will provide each with a signed card of identification to be presented at the Cathedral on the morning of the day on which the Sacrament is to be administered and stating that the bearer has been duly prepared." William Henry O'Connell to parish priests of the Archdiocese, n.d. 1916, Chancery Circulars, box 3, folder 6, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

3. "Cardinal Confirms Group of 600 Women Converts," *Pilot*, 22 June 1935, 1.

4. Yet only rarely did the city's mainstream newspapers mention the event. Despite Cardinal O'Connell's efforts and intention to use the event to send a message to Protestant naysayers among the Boston establishment, leading newspapers (the *Boston Globe* and *Daily Herald*) studiously ignored the event. Only in one year did the *Herald* note that the ceremony occurred on Memorial Day and included one paragraph summarizing the event on a page with announcements of the day's patriotic celebrations.

5. Massachusetts Baptist State Society, "Report of the Committee of Reference," *The Massachusetts Baptist Year Book, Containing the Annual Reports of the Massachusetts Baptist State Societies with Minutes of Proceedings at the Anniversaries* (Boston: Griffith-Stillings Press, 1911), 58.

6. Kristen P. Farmelant, "Trophies of Grace: Religious Conversion and Americanization in Boston's Immigrant Communities, 1890-1940" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2001). See chap. 2, "Contested Spaces: The Sites of Contest for Immigrant Souls."

7. The only converts named by Catholics, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Baptists tended to be those of high social standing, such as Catholic converts Martha Moore Avery and Miss Jean Patten. Patten's change in affiliation was front-page news in the *Pilot*, when she, the stepdaughter of Thomas F. Davies, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, was married by Cardinal O'Connell in his private residence. "His Eminence Officiates at Nuptial Mass," *Pilot*, 14 June 1930, 1. While most denominations kept working-class and immigrant converts anonymous in their publications, some (particularly Congregationalists and Catholics) reported greater detail regarding work and success among Chinese immigrants.

8. My research was limited by the availability of individual church records. In addition, the ways in which records were kept were inconsistent both within and between denominations. While the dissertation focuses on the time period 1890-1940, not all the religious groups kept reports or records for the entirety of that period. Access to church records was circumscribed by federal rules regarding privacy. The federal government limits access to the federal census manuscript schedules to 1920; those of 1930 and 1940 remain closed. (The vast majority of the 1890 manuscript schedules were destroyed by fire at the turn of the last century.) Likewise, the Archdiocese of Boston permits researchers full access to sacramental records through 1920 only. After that date, statistics may

be tabulated but the gathering of biographical data is forbidden. Some other archives adhere to the federal ruling, while still others imposed no restrictions.

9. Episcopalians count communicants sixteen years of age and over as adults. See Title 1, Canon 17, Section 2b, *Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church, adopted in General Conventions, 1789-1991* (revised by the Convention, 1991). Interestingly, previous editions did not discuss baptism or conversion at all.

10. The data collected for the dissertation's database came from a variety of sources, including sacramental records at the Archdiocese of Boston and at the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, as well as from records in the collections of the New England Methodist Historical Society at Boston University's School of Theology Library, the Congregational Library, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, and several individual churches.

11. "President's Report," Massachusetts Baptist Sunday School Association, *The 103rd Annual Report of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention* (Boston: C. H. Simonds, 1905), 148-50.

12. "President's Report," Massachusetts Baptist Sunday School Association, *The 101st Annual Report of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention* (Boston: C. H. Simonds, 1903), 149-50.

13. Stephen Moore, "President's Report," Massachusetts Baptist Sunday School Association, *The Massachusetts Baptist Year-Book, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Baptist State Societies* (Boston: Griffith Stillings Press, 1915), 188.

14. Edwin Diller Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 28. Starbuck's survey pool of converts included members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, members of two regiments of soldiers (from Iowa and Tennessee), and nearly 800 Methodists who were alumni of Drew Theological Seminary. Methodists claimed the most members among these groups.

15. See, for example, W. S. Athearn et al., *Indiana Survey of Religious Education* (New York: George H. Duran, 1924); E. T. Clark, *The Psychology of Religious Awakening* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929); George Albert Coe, *The Psychology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900); G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York: D. Appleton, 1904).

16. Averages taken from the following: 543 of 1,147 converts in general data pool reported ages averaging 28.8 years. 310 of 623 converts to Catholicism reported ages that averaged 29 years. In both cases, the ages calculated ranged from 16 to 74. The data pool consists of information from approximately ten Catholic parishes in Boston. Three of these were national parishes. Non-Catholic data came from five Protestant churches.

17. Of the 1,147 converts in my database, 623 converted to Catholicism. Of this number, 136 were between the ages of 20 and 25 at the time of conversion,

with an additional 88 between the ages of 26 and 33. After age 33, the numbers drop off dramatically.

18. Fifty-five of the 110 people converted in their twenties and 24 converted in their thirties (72 percent). Sacramental registers, Holy Trinity German Roman Catholic Church RG IV.B.003, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

19. This is not to say that adolescents did not claim spiritual experiences and did not begin the process of conversion as pupils in a mission Sunday school. Rather, the reporting of converts linked the act to membership statistics, and most denominations required an adult state of mind in order to qualify for membership.

20. Title I, Canon 17, Section 1(b), *Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church, adopted in General Conventions, 1789-1991*.

21. See individual church's sacramental registers.

22. See, for example, work produced by the Boston University School of Social Welfare for the Massachusetts Council of Churches, including *Protestant Ministry to Italian People in Massachusetts* (1951) and *Boston's West End: A Study of Church and Community* (1949).

23. "President's Report," *The 101st Annual Report of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention*, 149.

24. In addition, Salisbury found, "Protestant women . . . convert at a significantly higher rate than Protestant men." W. Seward Salisbury, "Religious Identification, Mixed Marriage, and Conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 1 (spring 1969): 128. See also Murray M. Leifer, "Mixed Marriages and Church Loyalty," *Christian Century* 66 (January 19, 1949).

25. Converts in Boston parishes were overwhelmingly male, but the number of men and women confirmed at the cathedral each spring was nearly equal. Presumably, then, converts to Catholicism outside the city limits in rural or suburban communities were largely women. *Pilot*, 5 June 1920, 1.

26. The evidence for these statements may be found in denominational annual reports. The General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, *Minutes of the Annual Meeting with the Statistics* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publication Society, 1896-1948). Congregational Library, Boston, Mass.

27. Data reported from the French Congregational Church (1904-1933), the Swedish Congregational Church (1896-1949), the Norwegian Congregational Church (1896-1949), the First Armenian Church of Boston, and the Boston/Cambridge Cilician-Armenian Church. General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, *Minutes of the Annual Meeting with the Statistics*.

28. "The Work of the Episcopal City Mission," *Church Militant* (October 1904), 27.

29. Sacramental registers, St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal Chapel, Archives, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

30. General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, *Minutes of the Annual Meeting with the Statistics*.

31. Salisbury, "Religious Identification, Mixed Marriage, and Conversion," 128.

32. Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

33. Among scholars who have documented the relationship of Italians to the Catholic Church, see Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Harold Abramson, "Ethnic Diversity within Catholicism: A Comparative Analysis of Contemporary and Historical Religion," *Journal of Social History* 4 (summer 1971): 359-88; Rudolph Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," *Journal of Social History* 2 (spring 1969): 217-68; and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

34. Bob McDonald, informal interview with the author, North Attleboro, Mass., October 1994.

35. Miss Carter's reports were published regularly in the annual reports of the [Congregational] City Missionary Society. Congregational Library, Boston.

36. In Boston, Poles and Lithuanians toyed with schismatic church options like the Polish National Church. Parish correspondence files of the city's Polish and Lithuanian Catholic parishes are rife with discussion of ex-priests and men calling themselves priests who worked in immigrant communities with political and nationalistic agendas and who railed against the Catholic Church.

37. William M. DeMarco, *Ethnics and Enclaves: Boston's Italian North End* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1981).

38. Register of Converts, St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church, Waltham, Mass., RG IV.A.063.01, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston. See also Bigham family biographical notes in Kristen A. Petersen, *Waltham Rediscovered: An Ethnic History of Waltham, MA* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Peter E. Randall, 1988), 254-55.

39. Mary Martha Bigham, telephone interview with the author, 24 September 1999.

40. In collecting this data, I compared baptism and marriage records within parishes, except in cases where a pastor annotated a record listing a marriage as having taken place in another parish.

41. Likewise in the 1980s Dean Hoge, in his nationwide study of religious change among Catholics, discovered that "intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants is the greatest single source of new Catholic converts." Joseph Fichter, *Social Relations in the Urban Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), quoted in Dean R. Hoge, *Converts, Dropouts, Returnees: A Study of Religious Change Among Catholics* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), 8, 72. Hoge was a student of Fichter's at Harvard Divinity School.

42. This analysis does not take into account spouses who converted later

than one year into the marriage. Such conversions did take place, especially as children were born to a couple.

43. Sacramental registers, Holy Trinity German Roman Catholic Church. Boston city directories, 1899–1905.

44. Information on the Hansons came from original membership cards of First Swedish Baptist Church of Boston, kept by Calvary Baptist Church, Dorchester.

45. Membership Records, Book 3, Italian Methodist Church of Our Saviour, South Boston, New England Methodist Historical Society Collection, School of Theology Library, Boston University.

46. Francis Mazzeo, interview with the author, Concord, Mass., 15 March 1996.

47. Hoge, *Converts, Dropouts, Returnees*, 75–76.

48. Dan Malvestra, informal interview with the author, summer 1995. Mr. Malvestra shared his family story after a chance meeting at a microfilm reader at the Massachusetts Archives.

49. Sardella, "A Brief History of the Christ Community Baptist Church, Wakefield, Massachusetts, originally known as The Italian Baptist Mission or The Italian Baptist Chapel, Covering the Period between 1901 and 1950," 3.

50. Gustav Anderson, "Swedish Congregational Church, Boston (Scandinavian Free Church) Historical Sketch," Works Progress Administration, Church Records Survey, box 113, Congregational Churches, "Boston Swedish Congregational Church," Massachusetts Archives.

51. Prior to 1900, it was more common to find single Swedes converting to Episcopalianism than to find families joining at the same time. Evidence of this may be found in sacramental registers, St. Ansgarius Episcopal Church, Archives, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

52. Sacramental registers, St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal Chapel.

53. Sacramental registers, Holy Trinity German Roman Catholic Church.

54. The classic definition of conversion stems from William James's seminal work, *The Varieties of the Religious Experience*, published in 1902. His psychological interpretation of conversion as a "sudden dramatic change in religious sensibilities" that transforms a conflicted or "inferior" soul into a "superior" or unified one dominated studies of conversion for generations. William James, *The Varieties of the Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1994). Alan F. Segal wrote that James "defined conversion as 'the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided or consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, by consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities.'" Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 285.

55. "Work for the Chinese," *102nd Annual Report*, [Congregational] City Missionary Society (1918), 16.

56. City directories only note when the male head of a household died. The surviving spouse was subsequently listed as the widow of the deceased. Without a meticulous canvass of church records, it is impossible to compare the effects of the death of a father versus the death of a mother.

57. Sacramental registers, St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church, RG IV.B.34, and St. James the Greater Roman Catholic Church, RG IV.B.010, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

58. Sacramental register, St. Leo Roman Catholic Church, RG IV.B.151, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston.

59. Sacramental registers, St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church.

60. Sacramental registers, St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal Chapel.

61. Michael Shirley, telephone interview with the author, 28 July 1998.

62. Bishop Lawrence (bishop 1894-1941) was cousin to A. Lawrence Lowell, the president of Harvard College, and kin to Amos Lawrence. Bishop Lawrence also aided in the founding of the Harvard Business School. His son, William Appleton Lawrence, served as bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts from 1937 to 1957.

63. Sacramental registers, St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church.

64. Ibid. Additional biographic and demographic information came from Boston city directories, 1900 to 1915, Boston Public Library and Massachusetts Archives, and manuscript schedules for the federal censuses for 1900 and 1910, National Archives and Federal Records Center, Waltham, Massachusetts. The preponderance of domestic workers changing religious affiliations while working in wealthy households holds some irony. In the nineteenth century, the Archdiocese of Boston counted Irish maids in Yankee households as important agents for the church. Not a few young ladies of the households found their way to Catholicism via a friendly, faithful, and usually Irish, servant. Lord et al., *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, vol. 2, 723.

65. Many Boston employers contributed to and supported the city's many home mission efforts, including the Episcopal City Mission.

66. The Boston Manufacturing Company donated land on nearby River Street in 1891 so that its Swedish workers could build First Lutheran Church. In 1920 the congregation sold the church building and land to the BMC and built a new church across town. In 1922 the company donated the church to a fledgling Italian Catholic church community (which became Sacred Heart parish) whose members were employees of the mill. Petersen, *Waltham Rediscovered*, 239, 440.

67. Sardella, "Brief History of the Christ Community Baptist Church," 3.

68. Ibid., 1-3.

69. Sacramental registers, St. Ansgarius Swedish Episcopal Church. Additional information came from Boston city directories.

70. Sacramental registers, St. Francis of Assisi Italian Episcopal Chapel. Additional information from Boston city directories.

"A Strong Argument for Juries"

The Saga of Willett v. Herrick



MARK I. GELFAND

DURING THE 1920s, the Massachusetts courts faced two severe tests of their ability to administer justice. The more celebrated of these cases, *Commonwealth v. Sacco and another*, has usually been depicted as a gross miscarriage of justice, revealing the incapacity of judges and juries of that era to deal fairly with individuals from alien cultures and those holding radical political beliefs. The trial, conviction, and execution of these Italian-born immigrants generated shock waves that not only reverberated across the globe, but also continued to jar American society for decades to come. Although the other great legal clash of the 1920s lacked the high drama generated by the desperate efforts of Sacco and Vanzetti's supporters to save them from the electric chair, it attracted as much attention in the Boston press as did the events flowing out of the South Braintree armored car robbery and killings. *Willett and another v. Herrick and others* may have been "just" a civil suit, where neither the life nor the liberty of individuals was at stake, but because a great deal of property and esteemed reputations were on the line, it too raised serious questions about the functioning of the Bay State's courts.

Although the parties to *Willett v. Herrick* conducted their affairs in a milieu quite remote from that of the anarchist immigrants, the issues raised by their activities echoed some of the accusations against American capitalism leveled by Sacco and Vanzetti. And despite their very different origins, the two cases were virtually yoked together in time and place. The original legal papers in *Willett v. Herrick* were filed at the Norfolk County Courthouse in March 1921, just three months before the charges against Sacco and Vanzetti were heard by a jury in the same building. When *Willett v. Herrick* finally came to trial more than two years later, after a Supreme Judicial Court ruling gave the plaintiff per-

mission to proceed, the judge in Sacco-Vanzetti was conducting hearings on their motion for a retrial. Almost another year passed before that judge rejected the petition, and the *Willett* jury was still listening to testimony. Both cases made return visits to the Supreme Judicial Court in 1927: the *Willett* decision was handed down in March 1927, the Sacco-Vanzetti verdict the following month. The convicted murderers went to their legally prescribed deaths that August, destined to become historical figures, while *Willett* became a footnote in the annals of Boston's business community. Whatever the merits of the plaintiff's claims, the case deserves a better fate.

The Plaintiff

Unlike Sacco and Vanzetti, George F. Willett aspired to and by 1918 had, by most standards, achieved the American Dream. Generations of Willetts had toiled anonymously and lived modestly in eastern Massachusetts, but with George expectations were on the rise. Born in 1870 in Walpole, Willett attended public schools before entering Boston University. The "sacrifice of parents," his attorney explained to the jury in closing argument, "enabled him to go to [college] for a while, but he could not finish." After a short stint as a bank clerk, he began selling wool on commission, and before the 1890s were over Willett bought a reputable wool brokerage business from his employers. Marriage to the boss's daughter undoubtedly smoothed the path to ownership, but there was no question about Willett's skills as a businessman, and the firm prospered under his direction.¹

In 1907 Willett purchased slightly less than 50 percent of the stock of the American Felt Company. Felt, a fabric valued for its strength and soft touch, is manufactured from wool by the interlacing of individual fibers in all directions. The American Felt Company was not only the largest of the handful of big manufacturers in the field, but it also owned the Daniel Green Felt Shoe Company, a major shoemaking concern. A few years after acquiring his initial stake in American Felt, Willett bought out the other shareholders.²

In 1912 Willett formed a partnership with Edmund H. Sears to own and manage his expanding wool-felt empire. Sears, who had worked for Willett since graduating from Harvard in 1899, carried one of the Commonwealth's most distinguished names and moved in social circles

Willett could only read about in the newspaper. At the firm of Willett, Sears & Co., however, there was no doubt who was in charge: Willett received 85 percent of the profits. Despite these differences they worked well together, their contrasting temperaments complementing each other nicely. Willett, observed his attorney, was the "fearless, open, frank, bluff, dynamic sort of individual who furnished power," while Sears was "a financier, cool, cautious, timid, fearful, hesitant, but a man of really sound judgment [who] furnished guidance and caution." When disaster struck, they remained loyal to each other, but if Sears was prepared to accept defeat, Willett demanded his day in court.³

At the time the United States entered into World War I in April 1917, Willett was in the midst of expanding his textile operations. He had purchased mills equipped to produce blankets and carpets, believing that finding more uses for wool meant less waste and higher profits. With a broader line of wares, his sales force could operate with greater efficiency; likewise, to cut expenses, he formed a new company to centralize the ancillary services required to keep the various units up and running. All told, the firms controlled by Willett, Sears & Co. employed 8,000 workers. It was indicative of Willett's organizational skills that he was called to Washington in the winter of 1917-1918 to assist the United States Army's quartermaster general in establishing a supply network.⁴

Willett returned to Boston to find his own business in disarray. The cause of Willett, Sears & Co.'s plight would be one of the major points of contention at the trial: the defendants blamed Willett's reckless over-expansion, whose rickety structure, they argued, had been hidden by manipulation of the accounting books; Willett ascribed his problems, which he held to be only temporary, to the war-induced increases in labor and commodity costs. Whatever the reason, the company, faced with a deadline on outstanding loans, needed an infusion of money to avert bankruptcy. The process by which these funds were made available and the manner in which the terms of agreement were implemented became the basis for Willett's lawsuit.⁵

Caught in a "Den of Thieves"

Like most entrepreneurs, Willett had relied upon loans to conduct and enlarge his operations. His firm had, over the years, developed intimate banking relationships with several financial institutions and enjoyed a

good credit rating. When Willett, Sears & Co. found itself short of capital in the spring of 1918, the partners turned to their bankers with confidence that their request for assistance would be sympathetically received. Less than a year later, Willett and Sears, their backs against the wall, sold to these same bankers their interests in the American Felt and Daniel Green companies for a fraction of their value. After the shock of what had happened had worn off, Willett brought legal action against the bankers, alleging breach of fiduciary duty and conspiracy to deprive Willett, Sears of its property.

The lengthy and detailed complaint filed by Willett focused on two specific series of events, each involving the fiduciary and conspiracy claims. First, Willett charged, the bankers in June and July 1918 abused the trust and knowledge gained through prior and present fiduciary relationships with Willett, Sears & Co. to induce the partners to accept a distinctly unfavorable loan agreement. That agreement was the product of a conspiracy among bankers and their associates to deny Willett, Sears the money it needed except under such conditions that would result in the loss of the firm's holdings in American Felt and Daniel Green. As part of the \$3 million loan contract signed on July 31, 1918, Willett and Sears sold their controlling interest in American Felt for \$500,000, with an option to buy it back within twenty-three months for \$1.227 million.

Second, according to Willett's complaint, in the months that followed, the bankers and their associates conspired, in breach of their fiduciary obligations, to make it impossible for Willett, Sears to exercise its option. By willful mismanagement of the subsidiary companies and legal harassment of Willett, they succeeded in depriving him of the financial assets he had expected to use to regain ownership of American Felt. On March 24, 1919, facing personal bankruptcy and in poor physical and mental health, Willett, along with Sears, relinquished their right to repurchase in exchange for a payment of \$125,000. Thus the bankers—whom Sears called a “den of thieves”—gained control of businesses earning more than a million dollars a year. Willett's suit against his tormentors asked \$15 million in damages, the largest amount yet sought in a tort action in the Massachusetts courts.⁶

The Defendants

The staggering sum Willett felt his due would have been enough to draw public attention to his legal complaint under most circumstances.

Combined with the status of the individuals targeted in the suit, however, the litigation proved irresistible to the local press. Although it was commonly referred to as the Willett or Willett-Sears case, it was the defendants who gave the litigation its notoriety. After nearly two decades of muckraking journalism, Bostonians, like most Americans, had become inured to stories of business skullduggery, but rarely had these revelations hit so close to home or been so personalized. Conspiracy was a term usually associated with foreign-born radicals plotting to destroy capitalism, but here was Willett charging those who sat at the very top of the capitalist system with scheming to destroy an individual trying to make his way upward. Furthermore, in a financial community where trusteeship was an important profession and almost a sacred duty, allegations of breach of fiduciary relationship could not be shrugged off lightly. More than personal reputations (and wealth) were at stake in this lawsuit.

Willett's complaint listed the members of two partnerships and two individuals as defendants. Both partnerships were financial firms: Kidder, Peabody & Co., an investment banking house; and F. S. Moseley & Co., brokers in short-term commercial paper. Although all the partners of the firms were legally at risk, one man at each house was actually the target of the allegations—Robert Winsor at Kidder, and Sewall H. Fessenden at Moseley. The two men named separately, Daniel G. Wing and Robert F. Herrick, had several business ties, but one link was pivotal to this case: Wing was president of the First National Bank of Boston, and Herrick was a former director of the bank and its counsel on many legal issues. Alone, each of the four towered over Willett in prestige and fortune; together they gave the case a David-and-Goliath character.

Robert Winsor was the eldest and most distinguished of the defendants. Sixty years old in 1918, he was a graduate of Harvard (1880) and started working for Kidder, Peabody & Co. right out of college. Along with Lee, Higginson & Co., Kidder was the leading member of New England's financial community, and in the two decades after 1905 Winsor was often referred to as "the J. P. Morgan of Boston."⁷

Like most Boston financiers, Winsor was deeply involved in the textile industry, and when Willett was exploring the purchase of American Felt he sought his advice. Kidder handled the \$1.3 million of American Felt preferred stock Willett issued to underwrite the acquisition, and one of Winsor's partners was placed on the American Felt board to protect Kidder's customers. Winsor had little contact with Willett in the years

following, but when Willett, Sears's monetary problems deepened in 1918, he was among those approached for assistance.⁸

Feeling an obligation to Kidder's clients who had bought American Felt stock at his firm's recommendation, Winsor was receptive to Willett's pleas for an immediate \$500,000—but at a price. He proposed a deal that would have brought Kidder a \$500,000 commission plus an interest rate of 6 percent on the borrowed funds. Actions by others soon superseded this offer, however, and Winsor joined the consortium of lenders who were parties to the July 31, 1918, agreement. Willett's complaint did not claim that Winsor originated the conspiracy, but it did portray him as a knowing participant. "He is one of the men," the plaintiff's attorney declared at the trial, "that sits in his palatial banking house and lets the dirty work . . . be done by others, while he puts on his mantle of high respectability, but takes his share—but takes his share."⁹

If Winsor was portrayed as ready to profit at Willett's expense, Sewall H. Fessenden was presented as equally prepared to take advantage of his troubles, but closer to the center of the alleged conspiracy. Like Winsor, Fessenden came from a prominent family, and he solidified his social position by marrying a Lee. Harvard Class of 1886, he became a partner at F. S. Moseley & Co. in 1892. Fessenden and his firm were not in the same league as Winsor and Kidder, but they enjoyed ready access to Boston's powerful banking institutions. For almost a decade before 1918 Moseley had handled Willett, Sears's short-term borrowing needs as well as the financing of its purchase of several smaller companies. It was to Fessenden that Willett turned first when he returned from Washington and realized that his business empire was in desperate need of cash.¹⁰

At the heart of Willett's charge against Fessenden was that he had: (1) accepted a fiduciary relationship with Willett by seeking the financing Willett needed; and (2) conspired with the other defendants to force Willett's assent to the bankers' demands of July 31, 1918. Willett contended that he had relied upon Fessenden's good judgment and good faith but had received neither because Fessenden had been led astray by others.¹¹

Although "Proper" Bostonians found it difficult to believe the allegations made against Winsor and Fessenden, whatever creditability Boston's elite gave to Willett's claims would have derived from their knowledge of the social origins of the third defendant, Daniel G. Wing. Born in Iowa in 1868 and raised in Nebraska, Wing did not come to Boston until he was in his thirties and in the lowly position of a federal

bank examiner. Despite his lack of good breeding and education, Wing immediately impressed the financial community with his skills and drive, and in 1900 the new owners of the Massachusetts National Bank placed him in charge. In less than two decades, Wing transformed, "by conquest, alliance and salvage," an institution on the brink of collapse into the leading commercial bank in the region.¹²

It was in recognition of the premier position of the First National Bank of Boston (as the Massachusetts National Bank had been rechristened after taking over the bank with that name) that Fessenden sought to include it in the group of lenders he was organizing to assist Willett. Once afforded *entrée*, Wing, according to Willett's complaint, became the key link in the chain of conspiracy: he encouraged Fessenden to violate his fiduciary duties by suggesting the possibility of richer rewards; and he insisted on bringing into the proposed deal the individual who would put the conspiracy together.¹³

The alphabet placed Robert Herrick at the top of the list of defendants, and Willett believed the positioning appropriate because Herrick was the group's "mastermind." It was Herrick who demanded that the loan agreement include the sale of Willett, Sears's stock in American Felt to the syndicate of bankers led by Herrick; it was Herrick who managed the various Willett, Sears companies in such a way as to destroy their value to Willett; and it was Herrick who, after buying up—at fire sale prices—Willett's other financial obligations, had them presented, through the employment of anonymous intermediaries, to the beleaguered entrepreneur for immediate payment. If the complaint and subsequent trial depicted Winsor and Fessenden as weak men, succumbing to the temptation of quick and easy profits, Herrick came off as a devilish schemer. Nonetheless, Willett's counsel, in his closing argument to the jury, expressed "a certain admiration" for Herrick:

[H]e didn't make the pretense. He let it be known to Willett that he hated him and he was glad he had him in his power. He wouldn't speak to him, and he would humiliate him, but he didn't pretend to be his friend. He didn't meet him with false smiles; he didn't say polite words to him. And when you are thinking whether Robert Winsor should be let out of this situation, remember that Herrick had the courage of his behavior. He was not a Judas, anyway. He fought like a lion—bitter—or a wolf, merciless, cowardly if he was cornered, but he didn't pretend to be a friend. You knew where to place him, and that is some credit to him.¹⁴

Unlike the other defendants, Herrick was a lawyer by training. Indeed, when he received his diploma from Boston University Law School in 1886 he was, at twenty years of age, too young to take the bar examination. Instead, he entered Harvard College and graduated magna cum laude in 1890. Harvard, and especially its rowing team, which he had captained, became one of the great attachments of his life. He was serving on the board of overseers when the events that led to Willett's suit took place, but the proudest moment in his life came in 1914 when he coached the undergraduate crew to victory in the Great Challenge Cup at the Henley Regatta, the first ever by an American eight.¹⁵

With Herrick, the line between attorney and businessman became blurred. He spent his workday not only dispensing legal advice to powerful corporate clients, but, as trustee for a large estate with considerable holdings in the textile industry, also managing large manufacturing companies. These activities, plus his membership on the boards of several banks, led one of Herrick's law partners to observe that "there was hardly any important business transaction in Boston in which he was not in some way involved or consulted."¹⁶

If the Willett, Sears & Co. loan was the first time Herrick and Winsor crossed paths professionally, Herrick and Wing had a long history of business dealings. Herrick had helped Wing get the presidency of the First National Bank, and Herrick was a director there until he had to resign when the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 prohibited interlocking directorates. But the Herrick firm continued to handle most of the bank's legal affairs, and as before, the two men occasionally made investments together. One such venture had been the United Felt Company, which in 1907-1908 purchased a majority of the shares in the American Felt Company. It was from Herrick, Wing, and an associate that Willett acquired control of American Felt. Herrick's "hatred" for Willett, the plaintiff contended, derived from the attorney's sense that Willett had gotten the better of him in the deal for American Felt. Revenge, as well as greed, drove Herrick to his immoral and illegal actions.¹⁷

The Lawyers

To pursue his courtroom battle against the bankers, Willett hired one of the few prominent Boston attorneys to endorse publicly the nomination of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court in 1916. As the self-appointed "people's attorney," Brandeis had tangled often with the Boston financial

community (especially Robert Winsor) for more than a decade before his selection to the high court, and his book, *Other People's Money and How the Bankers Use It* (1914), had cited the First National Bank of Boston as part of the "money trust." Having praised Brandeis then for his "unselfish devotion to the great masses of our people," Sherman L. Whipple was now taking on a client whom Brandeis might well have agreed to represent had he still been in private practice.¹⁸ Soon after the case went to trial, Justice Brandeis wrote to his close associate, Harvard Law Professor Felix Frankfurter, "I am glad to know the bankers are scared re Willett. The degree of their robber rapacity was a great surprise to me even as late as 20 years ago."¹⁹

Unlike the Kentucky-born and Jewish Brandeis, Sherman Whipple was a purebred Yankee, whose New England roots went back to 1638. Born in New Hampshire and having received both his undergraduate and law degrees from Yale, Whipple had no trouble fitting into Boston when he decided to establish his legal practice there in the mid-1880s. Over the next quarter of a century Whipple's courtroom skills brought him fame and fortune. He was involved in several well-publicized battles over wills and some high-profile business cases. The \$220,000 fee he received in a case involving fraud in a corporate reorganization was the largest on record in New England. (Among the defendants was Robert Winsor's Kidder, Peabody & Co.) Through at least 1910 Whipple had not been identified with the widening struggle for social justice; he had frequently appeared before judges to argue for corporate clients against their workers and had represented milk contractors in their unpopular fight against dairy farmers. But Whipple, a Democrat, had political ambitions, and perhaps recognizing the growing strength of Progressive reform he became more selective in choosing his clients. His commendation of Brandeis in 1916 signaled Whipple's new political posture. When Willett needed a lawyer a few years later, Whipple was an excellent fit.²⁰

Each of the defendants hired his own counsel, and while none of them enjoyed Whipple's public renown, they were all distinguished attorneys. One had been a Massachusetts superior court judge, and another would subsequently be appointed to the federal bench by President Hoover. Capable as they were, what stood out most about them was their number: the defendants had hired, observed *Fortune* magazine facetiously years later, "half the lawyers in Boston." With sometimes a dozen lawyers sitting at the defense table during the trial, it may well

have seemed that way to Willett and Whipple—and the jury. The effect was to underscore the vast disparity in the status and resources of the two sides.²¹

Preliminary Skirmish

In filing a suit in tort in Norfolk County in March 1921, Whipple had chosen both legal and geographical fields of battle favorable to his client. Several options were open to him in seeking redress for Willett. By going the route of tort, as opposed to equity, for example, which the defendants' attorneys insisted was the only appropriate course, Whipple assured that a jury, and not a trial judge, would decide the dispute. And by bringing the case in Norfolk County, Whipple sought a home court advantage in regard to that jury. Willett, Sears & Co.'s offices were in Boston, as were the offices of each of the defendants, and it would have been convenient for all the parties and their counsel to litigate the suit at the Suffolk County Courthouse in downtown Boston. Norfolk County, stretching over more than a score of towns, included both Walpole, where Willett had grown up, and Norwood, where Willett lived with his wife and children as a leading citizen. Whipple expected a Norfolk jury to be favorably disposed toward a local man who portrayed himself the victim of scheming Boston bankers.

The defendants' lawyers had no way to stop Whipple from filing his complaint in Norfolk County, but they could try to prevent it from reaching a jury. In lengthy demurrers filed with the Norfolk Superior Court, they argued that Whipple had failed to set forth any *unlawful* acts by their clients that would constitute grounds for an action in tort. Nothing any of the *individual* defendants had done was outside of customary and prudent business behavior. Rejecting the defense's motion to dismiss the complaint, the judge nonetheless ruled that this issue, and others raised by defendants' counsel, should be settled by the Supreme Judicial Court before the suit proceeded to trial.²²

The Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) heard oral arguments in November 1921 and rendered its decision the following July. Although the justices upheld some minor points in the defendants' demurrers, they accepted Whipple's contention that "the allegations of conspiracy are in and of themselves allegations of a tortious act." What would be considered lawful actions when taken by individuals, the unanimous opinion noted,

might become unlawful when undertaken by a group of people through concerted action:

This principle has been applied in labor cases. . . . But the principle is by no means limited to combinations of labor. It is equally applicable to combinations of capital. . . . It is . . . unfair competition for a combination of bankers to inflict injury upon the business or credit of an individual, by acts which become illegal because of the influence and power they wield.²³

The analogy to labor cases was striking: for decades, conspiracy laws, with bankers among their most enthusiastic supporters, had been used to prevent workers from acting in concert to advance their interests; now the SJC was prepared to let these same laws be turned against their champions. *Willett v. Herrick* had suddenly moved beyond one man's fight to recoup his financial losses and other men's struggle to protect their reputations (as well as their wallets) to a landmark test of the community's ability to bring the business of providing credit under legal control.²⁴

Judge and Jurors

If Whipple held the initiative in laying out the legal issues and choosing the site of the trial, there was one facet beyond his control: the judge. The twenty-nine judges of the Superior Court were assigned to the Commonwealth's county courthouses at the discretion of the chief judge. Sometimes a judge might request to preside over a particular trial, as Webster Thayer did in *Sacco-Vanzetti*, but usually it was a matter of geographical proximity—judges heard cases in locations reasonably convenient to their homes. It is not known what considerations led to the naming of the trial judge in *Willett v. Herrick*, but if geography was involved it may well have functioned in reverse fashion. The person selected came from the other side of the Commonwealth, a physical distance measured in but scores of miles, but psychologically a world away.

Christopher T. Callahan was born in Boston in 1868 but spent his working-class childhood in Connecticut. As a teenager he moved to the factory city of Holyoke, where he found a job as a newspaper reporter

and studied law in an attorney's office. Unlike three of the defendants and all the counsel for both sides in *Willett v. Herrick*, Callahan would get ahead without benefit of a college degree. After being admitted to the bar in 1889, he combined his law practice with an active involvement in politics. A Democrat in a rock-ribbed Republican part of the state, he won elective office just once, in 1910 as district attorney for the combined Berkshire-Hampden court. Callahan was appointed to the Superior Court in 1914 by fellow Democrat and coreligionist, David Walsh, the first Irish Catholic to occupy the governor's seat.²⁵

Although Callahan was known, the *Globe* observed, "as one of the most lovable men on the Superior Court bench—courteous in his old-fashioned manner, but never stiff nor formal," his pre-judicial political career had been "singularly stormy." No national politician in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries threw as much fear into the hearts of powerful bankers in Boston and other large cities as William Jennings Bryan, and Callahan had been a fervent supporter of the Nebraskan. In 1896, when the Massachusetts Democratic Party split over Bryan and his espousal of "free silver," Callahan, not yet thirty years old, was nominated for the lieutenant governorship on the pro-Bryan ticket. He lost, just as he did in a repeat run the next year, but Callahan's enthusiasm for the Commoner did not slacken. At the Democratic National Convention in 1908 he played a prominent part in helping Bryan gain a third, but ultimately futile, shot at the presidency. Callahan would later become disenchanted with Bryan over his advocacy of prohibition and fundamentalism, but there is nothing to suggest that Callahan regretted having joined Bryan in his fight against the great financial trusts. Now wearing judicial robes, Callahan was supposed to keep his personal views from influencing his handling of cases, but the defendants and their attorneys in *Willett v. Herrick* would certainly not have placed him among their top choices.²⁶

Callahan's initial ruling could only have confirmed their fears. In civil trials, plaintiffs and defendants were each allowed two peremptory challenges to potential jurors. Counsel for Herrick and the others requested that Callahan give two such challenges to each of the four defendants. He rejected their motion, and the defense attorneys filed their exceptions to the decision, the first of more than a thousand exceptions they would lodge as the basis for appeal.²⁷

As it turned out, jury selection was just about the only thing in the case that proceeded quickly. Seventeen men were examined before the

required complement of twelve was filled,²⁸ and it was all over in less than forty minutes. Whipple used just one of his challenges—on a chauffeur—and the defendants' lawyers employed their two challenges on a compositor and a secretary. Those who passed muster would have their names, occupations, and hometowns printed in the next morning's newspaper, and printed again when they rendered their verdict—more than a year later.²⁹

As Whipple had expected, the jury came a lot closer to matching Willett's socioeconomic profile than the defendants'. Except for a retired minister, all basically earned their living by working with their hands. There was a machinist in a bolt and rivet factory, a shoemaker, a baggage master on the New Haven Railroad, a mason, a carpenter, and a painter. There were also four clerks and a printer who operated his own shop in Boston. Except possibly for the last, none would have been familiar with the large sums of money and complicated financial deals that were described time and again in the testimony or the accounting statements that would figure heavily in the evidence. Like Willett, they undoubtedly wanted to make more of themselves, and as they sat in the jury box day after day they probably came to realize how hard those who already had succeeded could make that for them.³⁰

The Trial

Judge Callahan opened the trial on November 8, 1923, and when the case was finally given to the jury ten days before Christmas 1924—after 184 days of arguments, testimony, and charge by the judge—the jurors, who were not permitted to take notes, had heard from forty-five witnesses and received 954 exhibits.³¹ The trial transcript filled approximately 18,000 typed pages; each day a team of three court reporters and four typists worked well into the evening to prepare ten copies of that day's proceedings for the opposing counsel and judge.³² During the trial, special legislation would be enacted by the Massachusetts General Court to compensate the jurors for their extended absence from work;³³ Callahan would suffer a mild heart attack (which led to four-day trial weeks);³⁴ two jurors would be married; and another juror, after ten months of listening to testimony, would be excused with a "nervous disability." Since neither side at this stage wanted a mistrial, the proceedings continued with eleven jurors.³⁵

Not surprisingly, in a trial of such length and complexity, most days passed without real drama. The high points were the relentless grilling of Willett by the several defense counsel and the extended and barbed examination of Herrick by Whipple. Herrick took the stand as a witness for the plaintiff on January 16 and was not excused until April 15. When he finished, Justice Brandeis, obviously following the trial from Washington, wrote Frankfurter, "I am glad Bob Herrick has not had an all to[o] pleasant winter."³⁶

The most emotional moment came during the testimony of Eugene Thayer, a defense witness. A Boston banker who had moved to New York to become president of the Chase National Bank, Thayer would have been a defendant if it were not for the fact that he was no longer a Massachusetts resident. In direct examination, Thayer had supported the claim of Herrick and the others that Willett's empire was built upon shady accounting and that the bankers had acted prudently. In the course of the cross-examination, Whipple handed Thayer a letter and asked him if he had written it. Again and again Thayer tried to make an extended answer to the query, and each time Callahan or Whipple interrupted him to insist that he must limit his response to "yes" or "no." The reporter for the *Globe*, who usually supplied unvarnished accounts of lawyers' questions and witnesses' replies, described the scene:

Thayer suffered visibly and the tension in the courtroom grew almost unbearable. He studied this letter until it seemed as if every letter of it must be burned in his brain; he tapped each word of it with his fingers; over and over again the question was repeated to him. When Judge Callahan asked him if he would like to get off the stand to compose himself, Thayer stared at the judge, and seemed actually so dazed that he either could not comprehend what was said to him, or else could not answer.

Finally, after forty-five minutes, Thayer replied no to Whipple's question, and the cross-examination continued.³⁷

On the trial's 162d day, Friday, October 10, the jury received the last of the testimony. Jurors would not return to the courtroom for more than six weeks, as Callahan spent the rest of October and all of November considering the nearly 2,000 requests from counsel regarding the contents of the instructions he would present to the jury.³⁸

Closing arguments began on December 1, with each side receiving four days to make their final pleas to the jury. Defense counsel

demanding vindication of their clients' honor from this "carnival of slander." Whipple heaped further scorn on the defendants' character, arguing, "It was that position . . . of high respectability and confidence that enabled them to [carry out their scheme]. Lesser men, men without the power and influence and standing that they had had, could not have done it." He also repeatedly reminded the jurors of the 1922 SJC ruling that allowed Willett's suit to proceed: "For the first time, they applied [the rule against labor combinations] to the banker, and that the brick maker and the banker stand before the court on the same level—the same law for both of them."³⁹

Whipple concluded on the morning of December 11; Judge Callahan began reading his 250-page charge that afternoon. He did not finish until the afternoon of the thirteenth. Such was the interest in the lawsuit that the *Evening Transcript* published the complete text. After listening to additional motions, Callahan handed the case to the jury just after noon on Monday the fifteenth.⁴⁰

Expecting that the jury would require an extended period to complete its task, Callahan prescribed working and exercise hours for the jurors. Although the court would adjourn at 4:30 P.M., jurors could work into the evening, as long as "their minds were clear." They slept on cots set up in the courthouse and took their meals at a community kitchen across the street. The Willett jury became the first in Norfolk County history to stay out for more than twenty-four hours, and at 10:00 A.M. on Thursday, December 18, 1924, the jury informed the court it had reached a verdict.⁴¹

The business of the court that morning was over in a matter of minutes. The jury foreman, a minister used to speaking in public, announced that the panel had found for the plaintiff and awarded him \$10,534,109.07, just about the sum Whipple had requested in his summation. The jury had not been required to detail its findings or to explain how it arrived at the monetary figure, and it offered none.

Callahan dismissed the jury with the customary thanks of the court, and the jurors, after presenting the judge with a gift, dispersed into the obscurity whence they came. Several attorneys at the defense table came over to shake Whipple's hand and congratulate him, while others headed for the clerk's office to file motions for appeal. Whipple's only comment to the press afterward was notable for its brevity: "I regard it [the verdict] as a supreme act of justice." From Washington, Justice Brandeis wrote privately: "The Willett verdict is indeed a strong argument for juries."⁴²

Appeal and Reversal

In January 1925 Judge Callahan held hearings on the defense request that he set aside the jury's action. The court's attempt to render justice, counsel complained, had been undermined by "Whipple's sympathetic appeals to the jury—the poor man against the bankers, etc." Responding, Whipple praised the jury as "very intelligent" and urged the judge to sustain its verdict as a "matter of constitutional duty and constitutional right." A month later Callahan denied the motion for a new trial.⁴³

The next stop for the defendants was the Supreme Judicial Court. Their arguments for overturning the verdict, and Whipple's reply, filled nineteen volumes of testimony and briefs. On November 8, 1926, exactly three years after the Norfolk County trial began, the SJC opened a week of oral arguments on the case.

Although defense counsel spent most of their time highlighting the errors Callahan had committed, they also offered a warning to the court. The SJC's 1922 ruling regarding conspiracy, they cautioned, threatened to place all business combinations under a legal cloud, unleashing a torrent of civil litigation that would swamp the judicial system and undermine economic prosperity. Allow the verdict in *Willett v. Herrick* to stand, permit a jury, as was allowed here, to determine when coercion goes beyond the law of competition, and capitalism would lose its cutting edge, to everyone's detriment.⁴⁴

Whipple, who had clearly played to the jury's emotions at the trial, was all reason and logic before the five-member SJC. With one exception, it was the same group that had given him his 1922 victory, and he emphasized how the evidence offered at the trial met the requirements for a successful suit established by that decision. He left it to an associate to make the provocative argument that courts should impose legal liability for immorality in business.⁴⁵

The Supreme Judicial Court declined to make such a statement. The boldness it had demonstrated in the conspiracy ruling now gave way to a conservative approach to contract law. In March 1927 in *Willett v. Herrick*, just as it would a month later in *Commonwealth v. Sacco*, a unanimous SJC restricted itself to a narrow review of what transpired in the courtroom rather than consider the wider legal and social issues being raised. It is interesting to note that Chief Justice Arthur P. Rugg, the preeminent member of the tribunal, who in his thirty-two years (1906–

1938) on the high bench wrote 2,943 opinions and 4 dissents, let other justices speak for the court in both instances.⁴⁶

If the SJC decision in *Sacco-Vanzetti* rejecting a new trial for the defendants was remarkable for its consistent support of Judge Thayer's rulings, its opinion in *Willett v. Herrick* was noteworthy for the absence of any direct reference, except at the very end, to Judge Callahan. Instead, the SJC focused on the evidence available to the jury and concluded that there was nothing in the trial record to support the jury's decision to ignore the provision in the contract Willett had signed on March 24, 1919, whereby he relinquished his right to sue the defendants on any matter arising out of the transaction. Under the law, such general releases could be ruled invalid only if they had been procured by "concealments, misrepresentations and oppressions," and the SJC was not persuaded that this condition had been met.⁴⁷

It had been Whipple's contention that "no well-regulated scheme of fraud ever is carried out without a release as an incident." What was the use of taking a man's property by fraud, he argued, if he could come after you later in a lawsuit? It made sense to carry the same deception forward to gain a release, and this, he claimed, was precisely what the defendants had done. But if "concealments and misrepresentations" had been essential elements of the whole conspiracy, "oppression" was the key to signing of the general release. Herrick and the others had driven Willett to the brink of bankruptcy, and it was the fear of financial ruin that led him to yield his property and give the release. A release resulting from such coercion, Whipple had told the jury, "doesn't amount to waste paper, because you are forcing him to do it." Otherwise, he continued, "the robber who comes into your home at night and takes your valuables might also make you sign a release. You would know his wickedness, and would be only too familiar with his gun. But do you think his release would be of any value the next morning?"⁴⁸

Unlike the jury, the SJC was unimpressed by Whipple's analogy. There may indeed have been an illegal conspiracy leading to the contract signings on July 31, 1918, and March 24, 1919, but the general release itself was not tainted by this action. Willett had engaged distinguished counsel to handle his affairs in the winter of 1919, but lacking testimony from any of them, the SJC held that the plaintiff had failed to prove that they had been duped by the conspirators into advising him to sign the release. Nor had Willett demonstrated a fiduciary relationship with the defendants that might provide a basis for holding the release invalid.

It was understandable, the SJC summed up, for the jury to have determined that Willett had been “the victim of a hard bargain,” but the justices could be “concerned only with the legal rights of the parties, and cannot deal with the ethics of the situation.” Willett had “intelligently signed” a “valid and legal instrument,” and “there would be no faith in the obligation of contract or confidence in its performance” generally, if the court were to set this one aside. Callahan, it ruled, should have granted the defendants’ motion for a directed verdict.⁴⁹

Six years after the original complaint was filed in Norfolk County court, *Willett v. Herrick* was over. The SJC ruling was hardly a vindication of the defendants, but for their counsel it was a great professional triumph, which was widely hailed at the big corporate law firms. Despite Prohibition, the Willett decision prompted “the Boston bar to consume . . . as much champagne as greeted the Armistice.”⁵⁰

But Willett and Whipple had one hand left to play—appeal to the United States Supreme Court—and they played it, despite the slim likelihood of success. *Willett v. Herrick* had involved only Massachusetts common and statute law, and the Supreme Court usually refused to review state cases that did not raise a federal question. In a petition that was extraordinary for its scathing attack upon the integrity of the SJC, Whipple claimed that Willett had been denied the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantees of “due process of law” and “equal protection of the laws.” By “arbitrary assertions,” by “unwarranted and unreasonable inferences of facts,” by “inexcusable disregard . . . of findings properly made by the jury,” by “conclusions . . . absolutely inconsistent with competent evidence and the correct application of well-established rules,” the SJC had come to its decision “without any reasonable justification, and therefore, in a legal sense [the judgment] is made in bad faith.” “There is nothing more odious than judicial favoritism,” Whipple concluded, “and when, as in the present case, such discrimination has been exercised in favor of bankers it is as offensive to the 14th Amendment as would be legislative discrimination against them.”⁵¹

The briefs for Herrick and his colleagues rose to the SJC’s defense, claiming that the court’s review had been “able, conscientious and painstaking.”⁵² The Supreme Court that received these arguments in the fall of 1927 was the same court that had just months earlier refused to consider the appeal of Sacco and Vanzetti before their execution in August. It was also a Supreme Court that generally looked favorably upon the activities of America’s big businessmen and dimly upon those who

questioned the basic fairness of the American legal system. In rejecting Whipple's plea for a hearing, the Supreme Court, as was customary, offered no explanation.⁵³

Epilogue

For two of the three remaining defendants, the *Willett* case, although it seriously disrupted their lives at the time, proved only transitory in its impact. Robert Herrick and Sewall Fessenden moved back easily into their business and civic roles. Both continued as directors of the American Felt and Daniel Green companies until their deaths—Herrick in 1942, Fessenden a year later. Neither Herrick's fairly lengthy obituaries nor Fessenden's shorter ones mentioned the legal battle of the 1920s.

For Robert Winsor, however, *Willett v. Herrick* was a major ordeal from which he never truly recovered. He took Willett's charges as an attack upon his character, and they hurt him deeply. The post-World War I era was difficult for Winsor in any case, with the rise of a new generation of bankers and new financial practices with which he was unfamiliar. He died in January 1930; a year later Kidder, Peabody & Co. went into liquidation, a victim of Winsor's uncertain leadership over the previous decade and the world economic crisis of the early 1930s.⁵⁴

George Willett long outlived his adversaries, dying in 1962 at age 91, and while he probably gained some comfort in Kidder, Peabody's misfortune, his own life was marked by increasing bitterness. He spent the quarter-century after the SJC's reversal of the jury verdict in a vain search for funds to finance the large-scale residential developments he wanted to build in Norwood. By 1949 his only sources of income were his wife's estate and his daughter's contributions. In that year, at the request of his daughter and son, a probate court judge placed Willett under guardianship as an insane person, a ruling upheld by the Supreme Judicial Court in 1955. Experts had determined that Willett suffered from paranoid delusions of persecution relating to a "conspiracy to prevent him" from obtaining money for his housing projects.⁵⁵

In August 1977, half a century after Sacco and Vanzetti were executed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Governor Michael S. Dukakis apologized for the unfair treatment they had received in the criminal justice system. Dukakis's proclamation avoided comment upon either man's guilt or innocence, but it left no doubt that he believed they had

been maliciously treated by the trial judge and let down by the state's highest tribunal. What Katharine Anne Porter called "the never-ending wrong" had at least, and at last, been candidly addressed by a prominent government official.

No such apology was offered that same year on the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in *Willett v. Herrick*. In part this was because, as recent events have once again demonstrated, the briar patch of business behavior, ethics, and legality is still largely uncharted. A jury found Willett to be the victim of a conspiracy, but whether he was a completely "innocent" victim is open to question. Furthermore, while Willett suffered greatly from the final decision of the courts, the Commonwealth did not inflict directly, or even indirectly, the capital penalty it levied on Sacco and Vanzetti. And lastly, no apology appeared to be necessary because the injustice was not so evident. Whereas Judge Thayer's prejudicial behavior in the Sacco and Vanzetti trial was on public display for all to see (but to be ignored, as well, if one chose), Willett lost his case not in the open arena of a courtroom filled with spectators and the press, but in the closed chambers of appellate justices.

To be sure, the men in black presented an accounting of their decision in a lengthy opinion; however, they frequently strayed over the line separating the determination of law (which was their prerogative) from the determination of fact (which was the jury's). The message the Supreme Judicial Court delivered in *Willett* was just as emphatic, albeit not as dramatic, as that delivered by the thousands of volts ripping through the bodies of the two anarchists: neither radicals nor juries would be permitted to threaten the position of entrenched, powerful interests. More than any of them wished to acknowledge, Sacco, Vanzetti, Willett, and the average folk on the Norfolk County juror rolls had a lot in common: they were players in a judicial system where they had little influence.

Notes

1. *Boston Globe*, November 13, 14, 1923; December 7, 1924.
2. *Ibid.*, November 13, 14, 1923; Niran Bates Pope, *The Story of Felt* (Glenville, Conn.: American Felt Co., 1946).
3. *Globe*, November 13, 14, 1923; December 7, 1924; Sears entry in *40th Annual Report of the Harvard Class of 1899* (privately printed, n.d.), 220.

4. *Globe*, November 13, 15, 16, 1923.
5. *Ibid.*
6. The details of the events of 1918-1919 are set out in George F. Willett, *The Willett-Sears Case* (privately printed, 1927?), and conveniently summarized in Felix Frankfurter and James M. Landis, "Bankers and the Conspiracy Law," *New Republic* 41 (January 21, 1925): 219-20.
7. Vincent P. Carosso, *More Than a Century of Investment Banking: The Kidder, Peabody & Co. Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 34, 37, 51-52.
8. *Globe*, December 21, 1923; May 2, 1924.
9. Frankfurter and Landis, "Bankers," 219; *Globe*, December 9, 1924.
10. *Boston Herald*, April 29, 1943; *Globe*, November 13, 15, 1923; May 8, 1924.
11. *Globe*, November 15, 16, 1923; December 9, 1924.
12. N. S. B. Gras, *The Massachusetts First National Bank of Boston, 1784-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 151-54, 159-203.
13. *Globe*, November 9, 10, 13, 1923. Ironically, Wing was the only one of the defendants whose request, at the close of the plaintiff's case, for a directed verdict of not guilty was granted by the trial judge. Plaintiff's counsel had been unable to prove Wing's participation in the conspiracy. *Globe*, August 14, 1924. Wing, who was also the only defendant not called to testify by the plaintiff, became the leadoff witness for the defense.
14. *Ibid.*, November 22, 27-28, December 4-6, 1923; December 11, 1924.
15. Eugene J. Connolly, ed., *History of the Boston Law Firm of Herrick, Smith, Donald, Farley & Ketchum, 1890-1970* (Boston: George H. Dean, 1971), 23-24.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. v, 25-28.
17. *Globe*, December 21, 1923; January 18, December 11, 1924.
18. Alpheus Thomas Mason, *Brandeis—A Free Man's Life* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 106-17, 126-40, 153-77, 214-29; *Globe*, January 29, 1916. Whipple had been opposing counsel to Brandeis in a bankruptcy case in 1907-1910 and was called to testify at the Senate committee hearings on the nomination in regard to this matter. Although critical of Brandeis on some elements of his conduct, Whipple's testimony was seen by the nominee's friends as very helpful to Brandeis's position; Mason, *Brandeis*, 232-37, 475, 480-81.
19. Louis D. Brandeis to Felix Frankfurter, November 24, 1923, in "Half Brother, Half Son": *The Letters of Louis D. Brandeis to Felix Frankfurter*, ed. Melvin I. Urofsky and David W. Levy (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 149.
20. "Sherman Leland Whipple," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Scribners, 1936), 20:69-70; *Globe*, October 21, 1930; Richard M. Abrams, *Conservatism in a Progressive Era—Massachusetts Politics, 1900-1912* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 243-45, 266. In 1922 Whipple sought the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate seat held by Henry Cabot Lodge. Attacking Lodge as the "champion of bankers [and] banking companies," Whipple lost to William A. Gaston, a lawyer, banker, and industrialist who had many business dealings with Robert Winsor.

21. "Boston," *Fortune* 7 (February 1933): 104. The attorney for Fessenden, George L. Mayberry (Harvard College 1882, Boston University Law School 1885), acted as the lead counsel, making the first opening statement and the last summation for the defendants. The other attorneys were: Thomas Hunt (Harvard College 1887, Harvard Law School 1890) for Winsor; Frederic H. Chase (HC '92, HLS '94) for Wing; and Hugh D. McLellan (Colby College 1895, Columbia Law School 1902) for Herrick. Chase was the former state judge and McLellan the future federal judge.

22. *Willett v. Herrick*, Docket 12251, Norfolk Superior Court; Docket 4097, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, Massachusetts Archives.

23. *Willett v. Herrick*, 242 Mass. 471, 479–80 (1922).

24. Frankfurter and Landis, "Bankers," 218–20.

25. *Evening Globe*, September 16, 1929.

26. *Ibid.*; *Globe*, September 17, 1929.

27. *Globe*, November 9, 1923.

28. Although women gained the right to vote in 1920, they were blocked from jury service by judicial action and legislative inaction until 1950. See Alan Rogers, "Finish the Fight: The Struggle of Women's Jury Service in Massachusetts, 1920–1994," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 2 (2000): 27–54.

29. *Globe*, November 9, 1924.

30. *Ibid.*, June 8, 1924.

31. November 8, 1923, was also the date of Adolf Hitler's abortive *putsch* in a Munich beer hall. His trial, which began on February 24, 1924, lasted 25 days; he was released from prison on December 20, 1924, just two days after the Willett jury returned with its verdict.

32. *Evening Globe*, December 18, 1924; *Herald*, December 15, 1924.

33. Massachusetts General Court, 1924 *Articles and Resolves*, Chapter 92. Regular juror compensation was \$4/day; this measure raised that to \$9/day, effective January 1, 1924, specifically for the jurors in the Willett case.

34. *Globe*, January 28, February 14, 1924.

35. *Ibid.*, September 17, 1924.

36. Brandeis to Frankfurter, May 6, 1924, in Urofsky and Levy, "Half Brother, Half Son," 167.

37. *Globe*, October 10, 1924. The letter in question lent credence to the plaintiff's claim that the bankers were seeking to get control of Willett's stock in American Felt Co.

38. *Ibid.*, October 11, 1924.

39. *Ibid.*, December 5, 9, 10, 1924.

40. *Evening Transcript* (Boston), December 12, 13, 15, 1924.

41. *Globe*, December 19, 1924; *Transcript* (Dedham), December 17, 1924.

42. *Globe*, December 19, 1924; Brandeis to Frankfurter, January 1, 1925, in Urofsky and Levy, "Half-Brother, Half-Son," 187. Later that month, commenting on the *New Republic* piece Frankfurter had coauthored on the trial, Brandeis

wrote, "The Willett-Sears article should serve as a *mene, mene tekel* [Daniel 5:25, the "handwriting on the wall"]. At all events, 'pain has been given to my brothers.'" January 23, 1925, in "*Half-Brother, Half-Son*," 190, 191 n. 2.

43. *Globe*, January 9, 10, February 14, 1925.

44. *Ibid.*, November 9, 10, 1926.

45. *Ibid.*, November 12, 13, 1926.

46. The striking frequency with which Rugg was able to dissuade his associate justices from filing dissenting opinions was an outstanding feature of his tenure. Felix Frankfurter, who was offered a position on the court in 1932 but declined it, later said that his major interest in even considering the appointment was the opportunity it afforded for learning how Rugg managed this feat. *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces* (New York: Reynal, 1960), 233.

47. *Willett v. Herrick*, 258 Mass. 585, 595-609 (1927).

48. *Globe*, December 12, 1924.

49. *Willett v. Herrick*, 258 Mass. 585, 608-9.

50. "Boston," 104.

51. George F. Willett, Petition for Writ of Certiorari, Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1927, 2, 3, 57, 58.

52. Brief for the Respondents, F. S. Moseley & Co. and R. F. Herrick, Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1927, No. 396, 12.

53. *Willett v. Herrick*, Cert. denied, 275 U.S. 545 (1927).

54. Carosso, *More Than a Century of Investment Banking*, 66-69.

55. *Willett v. Willett*, 333 Mass. 323, 330-31 (1955).

*The Politics of Sex and Race in Boston's NAACP,
1920-1940*



SARAH DEUTSCH

IN MARCH 1939 Juanita Jackson, a successful NAACP membership recruiter, reported back from Boston to Walter White at national headquarters. "Am writing you a personal letter," she warned. "There has been an internal fight between Dorch and Julian Steele which almost split the branch wide open. So it's like treading on eggs up here now."¹ The immediate cause of the fight was the decision by Mr. Steele to marry a white woman.

Steele and Irwin Dorch were both black. Steele headed Robert Gould Shaw House, a settlement house primarily serving blacks; Dorch headed Boston's NAACP. They sat on each other's racially mixed governing boards. To the disgust of the white socialist secretary of the Boston NAACP, Alfred Baker Lewis, while Dorch defended Steele's right to such a marriage in front of the NAACP Executive Committee, as a Shaw House council member, Dorch helped force Steele to resign his position. Lewis complained to Walter White, "Uncle Tom at least told his Massa that his soul was his own. But Uncle Tom Dorch tells Massa Hallowell and Peabody [elite white Shaw House council members] that they can have his soul too!"²

This single interracial marriage highlights the issues of race, sex, class, politics, and generational rifts that beset black and white race reformers and activists in Boston between the wars. The vote of the Shaw House council to accept Steele's resignation ran 19 to 4. The fact that the vote among whites was 14 to 3 seems to have caused little comment beyond black and white accusations of hypocrisy. That not just Dorch but five of the six black council members also voted to accept Steele's resignation, on the other hand, caused general consternation, particularly among whites. Alfred Baker Lewis and other whites who supported Steele saw

that black vote only as "sordid," as "bootlicking for the white group" by "a bunch of Uncle Toms and Aunt Jemimas" in Lewis's words.³ But in black eyes the issue was more complex. Untangling the interwoven skeins requires examining both the promise and the frustration that these years held out for blacks in one northern city. Doing so illuminates the changing meaning of interracial cooperation.

Factionalism was nothing new to the NAACP; nor was it peculiar to Boston. The economic stress and mass mobilizations of the Great Depression exacerbated splits in the organization nationally, with new members pressing the NAACP to embrace working-class blacks and their issues.⁴ The splits, however, had an older heritage. A key feature of the factionalism, at least in Boston, centered not on attitudes toward interracial marriage, but on the nature of the NAACP as a "race" organization. White Boston NAACP treasurer George Bradford steadily resisted the identification of the NAACP as a black organization. Harkening back to Boston's Irish Catholic-native-born Protestant clashes, Bradford warned James Weldon Johnson that "an association for 'Advancement of Colored People' will not attract white people naturally, and there is danger that it will drift into an organization exclusively of colored citizens and be open to the false charge that it is a selfish racial organization."⁵

The Boston branch's position on this matter among both its black and its white officers, coupled with resistance to publicity, may help explain its nosedive from being among the most active and lucrative branches before World War I to being virtually moribund by the early 1930s. Butler Wilson, the black attorney who presided over the branch at the time, refused to take action in cases not covered by the law, refused to participate in NAACP national fund-raising campaigns, and refused to hold open meetings more than once a year. Like Bradford, Wilson seemed thoroughly imbued with a Progressive ideology which held, as he put it in his 1916 annual report, "that reasoning with persuading, and appealing to the sense of justice in people who discriminate against colored people is far more likely to cure evils than is a policy of attack, of publicity and of calling of names. Few men yield to coercion. Most men are amenable to persuasion."⁶

The issue of mass black action and strategies of black solidarity became increasingly salient, however, with the heightened black northern urban political leverage in the 1920s and early 1930s resulting from the Great Migration. That new visibility at the polls, in turn, led to renewed

tensions over the role of voluntarist organizations such as the NAACP. When Boston Brahmin author Margaret Deland wrote to NAACP leader W. E. B. Du Bois in 1929, asking him to protest against the election to Congress of Oscar DePriest, a black Chicago politician, because of his corruption, Du Bois declined. He instead congratulated DePriest, though he could not wholly approve of him. He did know that DePriest stood for the enforcement of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, the anti-lynching bill, the abolition of the Jim Crow car, and color segregation in civil service. He wished DePriest also believed in clean politics and smashing big business, bootlegging, and crime, but then, concluded Du Bois, he would not have been elected congressman from Illinois.⁷ The demands of white reformer supporters hardly meshed with the realities of black political potential, and new black alliances indeed risked alienating old supporters.

The Boston branch of the NAACP went so far in this direction as to participate in the campaign to prevent Judge Parker from reaching the Supreme Court in the early 1930s, but Wilson and three of his white board members strenuously resisted any further political campaigning aimed at defeating Parker's supporters at the polling booth. The creation of a black voting bloc via the NAACP, warned Bradford and Wilson in 1931, would invite reprisals, and under their leadership, the Boston branch passed a resolution against it. The rhetoric against a race organization sounded the same, and the speakers were the same, but the changed context changed the meaning. A black voting bloc had not been a real issue before World War I. Now such a bloc threatened the party to which race reformers—black and white—had traditionally belonged. Bradford and Wilson complained that since Parker's supporters, like his nominator, President Hoover, were Republicans, further retribution would play into the hands of the NAACP's Democratic enemies.⁸

The rise of black Democracy in the late 1920s and early 1930s was part of the changing context of black politics, voluntarist and non-voluntarist, in Boston as elsewhere, and ultimately transformed the cross-racial alliances and ideologies on which civil rights organizations like the NAACP had been built. Unlike many other northern cities, Boston witnessed a small, rather than explosive, growth in its black population during the Great War and in the 1920s, and much of that growth came from the West Indies, rather than the South. Relative to Boston's total population, blacks reached only 3.1 percent as late as 1940, hardly a blip on the electoral screen.⁹ But the decades also witnessed the consolidation

of Boston's black population as the West End's black Yankees joined newer arrivals in the South End and the northern part of Roxbury, particularly in what became Ward 9. A rich array of black institutions, including churches, stores, restaurants, club houses, settlement houses, and even a bank either moved there or started there.¹⁰

But if the South End was characterized by what it had, it was also characterized by what it did not have. In 1920 the director of Boston's new Urban League admitted, "There is probably no large city in the country where they [Negroes] find it so difficult to secure employment which will pay them a living wage."¹¹ Over a decade later, after gradually opening up new jobs for elevator girls, engineers, store clerks, and nurses, and even—most delicate of all—getting the Urban League's white board members to hire blacks, the Urban League found that the overwhelming majority of black Bostonians still worked at menial jobs. In the 1930s some private Boston schools still refused to educate blacks, and despite their stated policies, some YWCAs and YMCAs refused to house them. Offices refused to employ them, and despite there being a number of black patrolmen, police treated them harshly. In 1934 police shot and killed a black janitor who fled when he saw the motor vehicle police because when previously arrested for a minor traffic violation, he had been held incommunicado for three days.¹² By 1932–1933 half the district's people were receiving public welfare. By 1934 over 40 percent lacked jobs. Infant mortality rates skyrocketed, until they were the highest in the city. And hundreds of black Bostonians lacked homes, having lost them to the bank after struggling with mortgages for years.¹³

It was to get what the neighborhood lacked—jobs, money, justice, and housing—that people formed political organizations. Increasingly they organized along neighborhood or ward lines, to supplement their multitude of citywide lodges and sororities, and artistic, social, and social welfare clubs. And the party ward committee elections became hotly contested affairs.¹⁴

Ward politics intersected national politics. In August 1928, Du Bois predicted that, despite the numbers, black Boston would affect the congressional vote and had the potential to swing the state to Catholic Al Smith against the Protestants.¹⁵ With this promise, they might not be able to win a seat on the city council, but they could pick up national spots on party committees. Black attorney Julian Rainey, on the strength of his standing in Al Smith's national campaign and his status as an early Roosevelt man, swept into Boston to try to breathe life into a

Colored Democratic League that, under one Dr. William Worthy, had less than a dozen members—all men.

It was not that black women were loyal Republicans. On the contrary, while Dr. Worthy and Julian Rainey battled for a small following, Worthy's wife went from success to success at the head of the only incorporated black political organization in the state, the Colored Women's Democratic Club. It was Mrs. Worthy whose July 1932 meeting of 200 women decided the lily-white Republicans were more dangerous than southern Democrats. It was women, not men, who surged into the black Democracy. Already active in Boston's anti-lynching crusades, aroused en masse against Parker, these often new voters would not readily head for Hoover's party. And when an objection was raised to Julian Rainey as delegate at large to the Democratic National Convention because of his position as corporation counsel, it was Mrs. Worthy (her four children prominently mentioned) who replaced him.¹⁶

Boston's black Republican men, including attorney Matthew Bullock, might rage that women had gotten the vote too easily in 1920, without understanding the necessity of party loyalty, and that "the women in Roxbury were too busy in their political clubs to take an interest in the education and conduct of their girls," but Republican ranks, too, were filled with effective women. In 1920 Harriet Hall had been a cofounder of the Women's Republican Club on Beacon Street, making her donation so that the doors of the club might perpetually be open to black women. Having been elected to the Republican state and city committees in the 1920s, and serving as one of two black women on the board of counselors of the Republican National Committee in the 1930s, Harriet Hall (like Mabel Worthy, a doctor's wife) headed the winning slate for the Ninth Ward Republican committee, and held it against challengers supported by the black-run *Boston Chronicle* and a new organization with entirely male officers—the Civic League—who blasted Mrs. Hall for trying to close down a popular black South End restaurant, Slade's, as a public nuisance. Even the black ward boss was a woman, Mrs. Edna Black.¹⁷

It was against this backdrop of rising activity and promise by black men and women that Walter White wrote to the vice president of the Boston branch in 1936, in what must have been well-concealed relief, of his shock at learning that Butler Wilson had had to relinquish office in the NAACP due to illness.¹⁸ White set about, as much as he could from New York, trying to ensure that the new officers chosen in Boston

represented that new activity and could revive the branch, reach beyond elite black and white Boston, and finally turn it into a mass organization. He immediately ran hard into the race organization issue, once again.

George Spencer, a white minister and branch vice president, reported to White that the remnants of the Boston branch, in trying to select a new slate of officers, found themselves deeply divided. Without acrimony, according to Spencer, two members stood strongly for a white president, and as resolutely five stood for a black one. It was a board with a heavy representation of a younger generation of black leaders, including Irwin T. Dorch, who would later figure so prominently in the intermarriage vote, not yet a candidate for branch president. He was a graduate of Boston University Law School and had been a practicing attorney for a dozen years. The board also included some black and white ministers and some wealthy white women—the elderly peace activist Mrs. Lucia True Ames Mead and one Mrs. Frances E. F. Cornish.¹⁹

It was clear that the younger generation of black leaders, including Dorch and Reverend Oliver B. Quick, whom Spencer described as “very earnest and convinced in their attitude,” felt that the utility of a certain kind of cross-race alliance had passed. It was equally clear that not only Mrs. Cornish, but national NAACP officers saw that alliance as still vital. When the one candidate on whom all could agree, Republican black attorney Matthew Bullock, declined to serve because of other pressing duties, Cornish, Walter White, and his closest informant in Boston, Mrs. Florence Lewis, expressed grave reservations about the other potential black candidates. Lewis wrote to White, “I don’t think you realize how poor the Negro material is to choose from.”²⁰

She urged the appointment of someone white. “If you were here,” she argued, “mingling with the white public as one of them—listening to the prejudices they entertain and express toward the Negro—I’m sure you would share my opinion that a white man is needed to fill Mr. Wilson’s place.” While she understood “that some of the board are so color conscious that they can’t think beyond the present,” what whites had to offer the NAACP was quite clear to Lewis: money and influence.²¹

While Lewis would have preferred to find a white man to head the branch, Walter White suggested perhaps a white woman. There had, indeed, been a tradition of white female patrons of black causes in Boston. These patrons, and not black women, achieved high office in the

race reform institutions they funded and sometimes founded. Some of them viewed the work as a family obligation and virtually dynastic. Mrs. Ethel Moors was treasurer at the Urban League in 1919, its first year in Boston, and twenty years later was the second vice president. Her brother, Rev. George Paine, served on the council at Robert Gould Shaw House in the mid-1930s and on the executive committee of the Boston branch of the NAACP starting in 1936. Mrs. John Bartol and her daughters financed Shaw House's nursery school, and she became a member of the Shaw House council in 1932. Miss Alice Tapley was a key player at Robert Gould Shaw House (its vice president in the mid-1930s) and a member of the Boston branch of the NAACP Executive Committee in 1918.²² Juanita Jackson, preparing to run Boston's NAACP membership drive in 1936, was distressed to learn that Mrs. Cornish had resigned. She let the local committee know that the special gifts committee campaign was among the most important and suggested getting Mrs. Moors or Miss Tapley to replace Cornish, or some other outstanding woman, she wrote, with connection to wealthy people.²³

The result of this dynamic meant that social mixing across the color line in Boston between men and women was relatively commonplace if not always unproblematic. As early as 1914 the NAACP's legal redress committee in Boston was composed of three black men and two single white women. It seemed to arouse no comment. On the other hand, it was only in 1928 that the YWCA, after hours of deliberation, decided to integrate its new Boston residence, a bastion of pure young white womanhood. Who would pioneer that interracial frontier but Julian Steele, in his last year at Harvard, a decade before his explosive interracial marriage.²⁴

In 1936 the result of all these deliberations by White, Lewis, and the Boston branch was not a branch run by a white woman, but one over which Irwin T. Dorch, described by White's Boston informant as "not at all outstanding but as far as I know respectable," presided, and which numbered among its members one Julian Steele, director of Shaw House, and by many accounts, far more spectacular. In March 1937 the *Crisis*, organ of the national NAACP, profiled Steele (not Dorch) and declared, "judged by any standards, Julian D. Steele . . . is a young man who will bear watching." A 1929 cum laude graduate of Harvard, he had gone to the New York School of Social Work on a Julius Rosenwald fellowship and taken up the directorship of Shaw House on his return.²⁵

Under Steele's direction, Shaw House went from doldrums to rapid

expansion in funds, programming, staff, and physical plant, while Steele circulated through the greater Boston community as lecturer in Harvard's Department of Sociology and guest lecturer at most of the area's colleges and universities, secretary of the United Settlements, organizer of the Boston chapter of American Aid to Ethiopia, incorporator and lecturer at the New England Labor College, and regional vice president of the National Negro Congress. His contacts ranged across the political and racial spectrum. According to the *Crisis*, it was a "cardinal principle of Steele's philosophy that Negroes must co-operate with whites, and he has sought, by actual practice, to inculcate this maxim in the Shaw House."²⁶

It is not then surprising that the issue of the NAACP's role as a race organization quickly reappeared in the new branch executive committee. But the context had again changed—and so had the alignments. This time it was not the old-line Republican reformers opposing a new generation, but factions within a generation. Alfred Baker Lewis, a white man and the Socialist Party's New England district secretary, had become secretary of the revived Boston NAACP in 1936. Lewis, like another new white socialist board member, George Paine, meshed with the national NAACP's desire to bring the masses into the Boston branch. But Lewis's strategy meant building cross-racial alliances with the labor movement, and he ran into a number of roadblocks.²⁷

Previous attempts to bring the Boston Central Labor Union to a more racially inclusive policy had met with little success. In turn, in 1928 the Boston branch went on record against a federal anti-injunction bill until the labor unions would accept black members on the same basis as white members. Yet the Boston NAACP had no labor representatives or working-class blacks on its executive committee.²⁸

In March 1936 Lewis tried and failed to get the branch to pass resolutions favoring a labor party, both to steal the Communists' thunder and to court labor. He tried to get the branch to invite an organizer for the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union to speak to the branch in April, and in December he suggested A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, as the speaker for the annual branch meeting. Dorch was less than enthusiastic. In January 1937 Lewis explained to the branch that any program to increase black employment opportunities would meet with less friction if it were supplemented with efforts to increase employment generally and suggested the branch agree to cooperate with other groups, including organized labor, to decrease the hours

of work. After discussion, the branch rejected his proposal by a vote of five to four. By January 1938 Lewis complained, "I find in Boston a great deal of reluctance on the part of the colored group to get into organizations working for the general welfare. . . . It seems to me important that a large number of Negroes and Negro organizations should take a stand on progressive matters having to do with mankind in general rather than harp constantly on the race question"—perhaps an odd stand for a high-ranking NAACP officer.²⁹

Just under two months later, Lewis's friend and fellow leftist, Julian Steele, offered his resignation to the council of Robert Gould Shaw House, because, as he put it, "some of the Councillors for personal or other reasons, have expressed the belief that my coming marriage would decidedly impair my usefulness to Shaw House and the community it serves."³⁰ Writing to a sympathetic council member after the Shaw House vote that deprived Steele of his well-paid position, at \$3,500 a year, Walter White conveyed his annoyance: "I am exceedingly sorry that the Shaw House Board failed so completely to take what was so obviously the ethical and wise position it should have taken."³¹

The response to the decision by Julian Steele and Mary Dawes—a social worker and second cousin to the ex-vice president, Charles Dawes—to marry was hardly gratifying. The Shaw House neighborhood was split. At Mary Dawes's exclusive Ward Belmont College in Nashville, where she had gone after receiving her B.A. from Boston University, "the students, in protest to her impending marriage to Mr. Steele, hanged two 'Negroes' in effigy." And on the floor of the senate, Senator Bilbo used the marriage as his climax in a vicious attack on blacks.³²

These responses were not really surprising in an era when fresh lynchings graced every issue of the *Crisis* and appeared with almost the same frequency in Boston's black papers and when anti-lynching legislation in Congress, despite ever increasing efforts, made little headway.³³ While Boston's black women had long been active in the anti-lynching campaign, and despite it being Bostonian Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin who had organized the National Association of Colored Women to protect the reputation of black women, Boston whites assumed white female virtue and black female immorality. In 1932 two white gangsters in the South End had insulted two black female pedestrians. When the women objected, the men beat them. Forty enraged black men and a patrol wagon with ten policemen arrived on the scene at the same time. Only

police patrols for the next twenty-four hours, together with the swearing out of a warrant for the gangsters, kept the district from a race riot.³⁴

More ominous for Steele and Dawes, as late as 1927 the Boston NAACP found itself fighting off a newly introduced anti-intermarriage bill in the Massachusetts legislature. And only a year before their marriage, two policemen broke into a woman's house in Roxbury without a warrant and threatened her. It seems that they had convinced themselves that Mr. and Mrs. Randolph, he being black and she white, "were living there under lewd circumstances."³⁵ Despite decades of experience with cross-racial organizations, despite occasional instances of blacks being placed in positions of authority over whites (as in Maria Baldwin's elevation to principal of a largely white school), despite the mingling of white women and black men in the NAACP, many sensed, as the *Boston Chronicle* headline blared in February of 1932, "Boston Lacks Inter-Racial Cooperation."³⁶

Faced with this level of hostility and arrogance, black revulsion at interracial marriage is also not surprising. In the pages of the *Crisis*, Du Bois frequently ridiculed white assumptions that black men desired white women, that black men lusted uncontrollably for blondes, and confessed in 1929 that "contrary to the belief of most of our Southern white friends, we are not all anxious for the intermarriage of the races. We have no valid reasons, either biological or esthetic, to offer in support of this unfortunate prejudice on our part. Nevertheless . . . we prefer to have most of our colored friends marry colored people."³⁷ While Du Bois would give no reason, and none of the black opponents to Steele's position articulated a reason for opposing the marriage, his black defenders implicitly did so by denying that Steele was "guilty of selling out the race."³⁸

As the vote itself demonstrated, the meaning of interracial marriage in the era was up for grabs. In 1930, when Du Bois responded in the *Crisis* to a letter from a young white man about whether he should marry the black woman he loved, he was deluged with mail. The letters displayed absolutely no consensus within any group on the issue. Some defined it as a social issue, some as an individual issue, some as a question of love, and others as a question of will. In other articles in the *Crisis*, people in interracial marriages claimed the experience was less painful socially than they had expected. And black author Countee Cullen announced that while he had "no personal brief for intermarriage," he was tired of the representations of it where a brilliant African married a

dumb blonde and descended into Othello-like unhappiness: "I do await eagerly the advent of that pioneer who will in the face of . . . it is true, not millions, but surely several . . . successful interracial marriages, forget his formula and write one such story in which the ending will be happy and probable."³⁹

The marriage fit perfectly with Steele's pronounced thinking on racial matters. Reverend Alfred Bliss, a white Steele supporter, wrote to Walter White, "He has fought a good fight on the basis of a fundamental principle of race relations, I think." When Steele's supporters gathered enough funds for him to open a new settlement house in Boston, Steele declared it a nonprofit interracial enterprise to promote cooperatives, better housing, planned recreation, and a committee of labor to aid adjusting the black worker into the ranks of organized labor. According to the *Boston Guardian*, which applauded Boston's victory in keeping Steele in town despite the actions of the Shaw House council, the new settlement house would be "the answer to the narrow-minded element in this section's population who have not believed that a real unity of interracial interests can be built in Boston."⁴⁰ It was as though there were no boundary between interracial marriage and other interracial strategies, as though marriage were simply cross-racial cooperation of the most intimate kind.

Irwin Dorch, of course, saw things differently. Walter White (and several others) interpreted Dorch's behavior, including his politicking to remove Steele by going to white members of the Boston branch of the NAACP and Shaw House, as mean-spirited, jealous, and whining.⁴¹ Yet how then did Dorch manage to persuade the majority of the black members of both the Shaw House council and the NAACP's Boston branch, for a time, at least, to stand by him? Certainly Dorch and Steele had differences in status, education, and style, but Dorch had indeed succeeded in reviving the Boston branch, vastly increasing its membership, aggressively pursuing claims of discrimination, and, despite everything, holding the executive committee and the branch together for over a year until elections could be held without splitting the branch.⁴²

Dorch had his share of problems, and the timing of the controversy could not have been worse. In the very month that Steele resigned to marry, Dorch's wife died. As Dorch became increasingly frustrated at White's dismissal of his claims regarding the real reason he opposed Steele, his language became loftier and more entangled in the sexual aspects of the case. He felt his manhood was at stake and claimed in his

own defense: "I could not submerge my manhood and allow him to use the marriage issue to prevent me from doing what I knew was my plain duty and that had nothing to do with the marriage at all."⁴³

According to Dorch, his objection to Steele was only marginally about the marriage. He claimed there was general dissatisfaction on the part of the Shaw House council and staff at the amount of time Steele poured into his other endeavors, a statement borne out in Bliss's letter to White, when he reported that he had "vigorously protested against" Hallowell's letter on behalf of the council that indicated council members had lost confidence in Steele, "even though true."⁴⁴ Moreover, George Goodman—another black opponent of Steele—director of the Urban League and member of the Boston NAACP Executive Committee, warned Thurgood Marshall in June 1938 that for over a year, "a very definite block of us who are members of the Executive Committee of the Boston Branch have been thwarting certain efforts of a minority. Their objective has been to change the philosophy of the Association to dovetail [*sic*] with Socialism, Communism, I.L.D., etc., dependent on their interests."⁴⁵

Yet when these concerns showed up in a *Boston Chronicle* article supporting Dorch and signed by ten members of the Boston executive committee, Walter White dismissed it as an attempt to drag the "red herring" [pun intended?] of "communism and Socialism" "across the trail."⁴⁶ Since Steele's supporters were indeed largely socialists, and largely white socialists at that, and the foundation his friends created for him to head was entirely funded by whites, predominately, if not entirely, on the left, what is striking here is Walter White's steadfast determination to interpret the schism as personal, and Dorch and his supporters' determination to see the marriage and not the split between left and racial politics as the red herring.⁴⁷

It is tempting to find a real red herring in the case. Yet the very divide over the meaning of the vote signaled a time of enormous tension and flux in what is usually seen simply as a period of increased militance and coherence. The context of voluntarist politics had been drastically changed by the increasing political power of northern black men and women and the increasing complexity of their political party loyalties. The Republican allegiance of the earlier years had helped hold together the cross-racial coalition in the NAACP. It had not, however, led to major or even many minor gains for its black adherents. As the black

vote in the North became increasingly visible, it seemed to some, including Dorch, whether or not they left the party, that they could dispense with their paternalist and maternalist white reformer allies. They could direct their own organizations.

To others of this new generation, the hindrance seemed not the cross-racial alliances but the party itself. Amid the economic devastation of the Depression, the logical political alternative was not necessarily the Democratic Party. The Communist and Socialist Parties so successfully competed with the Democrats for black membership in Boston and elsewhere that they, and not the Democrats, at times in the press seemed the prevalent home for blacks alienated by the Republican Party. To Steele, his leftist, cross-racial alliances provided the best hope for the advance of all peoples.

Black women, in particular, had proven willing to strike out in new political directions even before the Depression. Yet it was telling that despite the presence of successful female black politicians in Boston, no one suggested a black woman should head the local NAACP in the 1930s. As new party political players, they could destabilize older political alliances and create new ones, as Mrs. Worthy did with the Democrats, and do it partly in the name of defending black womanhood. In the voluntarist politics of the NAACP, on the other hand, Irwin Dorch declared his manhood was at stake as he stood up to a board dominated by often paternalist and maternalist white reformers. In this theater, white women could be a destabilizing force, and black women were virtually invisible. One reason the presence of white women on the NAACP board had been so noncontroversial was precisely because the lines of deference seemed clear. It was one thing for elite white reform women, safely maternalist, to serve with black men on the NAACP board; it was something else entirely for a young elite white professional woman to marry one of those black men. It was indeed a cross-racial alliance of the most intimate—and egalitarian—kind.

Interracial marriage's meaning was embedded in rather than separate from tensions around the meaning of black politics and racial relations, leftist politics and racial solidarity, and new political actors. White and Dorch were both right, Steele's interracial marriage was both personal and political, and in the multifaceted fragmented new political world of 1930s Boston, there was no simple way to read it.

Notes

1. Jackson to Walter White, March 24, 1938, Papers of the NAACP, I-G-90, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
2. Lewis to White, April 15, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. There were at least three other overlapping board members—two white men and Dr. T. E. A. McCurdy, a black Garveyite physician. These boards were also densely interwoven with that of Boston's Urban League, and to a lesser extent with most of the black organizations in Boston. See records of the Urban League and NAACP at the Library of Congress for board member lists and for Shaw House letterheads. On Dr. T. E. A. McCurdy, see "UNIA Reorganizing," *Boston Chronicle*, January 21, 1933, 4.
3. On the vote, see Irwin Dorch to White, April 15, 1938, and George Paine to White, Easter [April 1938], NAACP Papers, I-G-90; for white responses against interracial marriage, council member and financial supporter of both Shaw House and NAACP, Harold Peabody, confidential [to White?], April 7, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. The black-run *Amsterdam News* called it "the deep-rooted hypocritical social philosophy upon which 'liberal' Boston has been thriving for years." *Amsterdam News*, May 14, 1938, Florence Luscomb Papers, box 11, folder 247, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. For white responses favoring Steele, see David K. Niles, of the Ford Hall Forum and member of the Boston NAACP Executive Committee, to White, June 11, 1938; Lewis to White, April 15, 1938, and May 31, 1938, in NAACP Papers, I-G-90, and Luscomb's letters to the editor of both black newspapers in Boston (*Chronicle* and *Guardian*) in Luscomb Papers, box 11, folder 247.
4. In an illuminating article focused on Chicago, Beth Tompkins Bates argues that the NAACP, at the national level as well as in member branches, suffered from splits in the 1930s between an old guard beholden to white, relatively conservative donors and a new crowd, younger and more interested in making the NAACP an organization of the mass black working class. According to Bates, Walter White suppressed a black boycott of Sears to avoid alienating a major donor. She sees White's turnaround as occurring in 1939, just in time for this story in Boston. Yet in Boston, the split is not between conservative white elite donors and leftist young blacks, but between leftist whites, who focused on ties with the working class across race, and young blacks, who focused on making the NAACP a mass black organization. Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 340-77.
5. Bradford to James Weldon Johnson, March 13, 1918; to Du Bois, April 23, 1919, against making the NAACP "a race organization"; to Nash, May 23, 1916, and February 28, 1917. See also Annual Report of the Boston Branch, December 1918, in NAACP Papers, II-I-43. Johnson to Bradford, March 27,

1918, in NAACP Papers, I-G-88. This anxiety could lead to some absurd pronouncements, as when the Boston branch's resistance to running a baby contest led Field Secretary William Pickens to write to Loud, "I might also call attention to the truth that although Boston has both white and colored members, as have many other of our Branches, it does not seem wrong to have a contest of Colored Babies—in as much as the members are not asked to furnish the Babies." January 30, 1926, NAACP Papers, I-G-88. For earlier factionalism, see Bradford to Nerney, December 31, 1915, and Nerney to Wilson, April 15, 1916, NAACP Papers, II-L-43. Bradford writes: "One of the inspiring things has been the way work has gone on in spite of the differences of opinion & friction between the workers." To win the confidence of "all classes," Bradford insisted, the branch needed a certain percentage of "all racial elements," meaning the branch should recruit English, Irish, Germans, French, Italians, and Jews. During the 1910s, the Boston branch's annual report proudly asserted that the branch did indeed harbor over a dozen different "races," including "a majority of the sons and daughters of the most noted New England Abolition leaders."

6. Walter White complained of Wilson's "throttle-hold on the Branch," and sent Miss Lydia Holly, a black woman of Haitian descent, to investigate. She concluded, "I think they should hold a memorial for the Boston Branch." On the heyday of the Boston branch, see, for example, Nerney to Bradford, February 20, 1913, and December 11, 1915, NAACP Papers, II-L-43. On branch inaction, see Loud to Ovington, January 3, 1920; Wilson to Johnson, July 29, 1925, and January 18, 1929, NAACP Papers, I-G-88; Wilson to Roy Wilkins, December 6, 1932; White to Wilkins and Pickens, January 11, 1934; Wilson to Dr. Louis T. Wright, chairman of NAACP's board, March 1, 1935; and Holly to White, n.d. [1933], NAACP Papers, I-G-89; and Wilson, Annual Report of the Boston Branch, December 6, 1915, to November 10, 1916, NAACP Papers, II-L-43. One of the anonymous reviewers of this essay argues that the NAACP declined in cities where it seemed the race question had been "settled," and its lack of credibility as a labor organization made it difficult for it to gain adherents in the early years of the Depression.

7. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis* 36 (February 1929).

8. Wilson to Loud, March 18, 1931; Loud to Board of Directors, NAACP, March 23, 1931, April 13, 1931; Cobleigh memo, April 1, 1931; and Bradford to Loud, November 7, 1930, NAACP Papers, I-G-89.

9. While Detroit's black population between 1910 and 1930 grew by 1900 percent, Cleveland's by 800 percent, and Chicago's by 430 percent, Boston's grew by only 50 percent, from 13,564 to 20,574. In 1920 Boston had had 16,350 blacks and by 1940, 23,679. That made blacks 2 percent of Boston in 1910, 2.2 percent in 1920, and 2.6 percent in 1930. Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 179; Gerald H. Gamm, *The Making of New Deal Democrats: Voting Behavior and Realignment in Boston, 1920-1940* (Chi-

cago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 95; Annual Report of the Boston Branch of the National Urban League, 1919/20, 4, National Urban League Papers, XIII-5, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

10. Older institutions, such as the Charles Street A.M.E. Church, and newer ones, such as the Urban League (founded in 1919), the League of Women for Community Service, and the Women's Service Club (both outgrowths of black women's World War I soldier's comfort units), headed for the South End in this period. Harriet Tubman House, a black women's residence created by black women early in the century to house women the YWCA and college dormitories would not, and Robert Gould Shaw House, started in 1908 by the white workers and patrons of South End House, provided meeting places for social and cultural events, and for the enormous number of black clubs (social, charitable, business, arts, and political). So did the two largest black-owned restaurants, it was claimed, in the country, Slade's and Estelle's, each of which employed a staff of 100 and each of which seemed increasingly to host political luncheons. By 1932 a South End cooperative bank, whose board boasted three black Boston NAACP officers as members (two doctors and a minister) as well as black businessmen and businesswomen whose shops lined the streets of the district, boasted \$140,000 in assets and had never paid less than a 5 percent dividend. *Boston Guardian*, June 3, 1939, 3, and July 29, 1939, 1 (on Slade's and Estelle's); June 10, 1939, 1, on the Charles St. Church; *Boston Chronicle*, September 17, 1932, 1 (on the South End Coop); Urban League, Boston Branch, Annual Report, 1919/20, 5, Urban League Papers, XIII-5.

11. Boston Urban League, Annual Report, 1919/20, 6, Urban League Papers, XIII-5.

12. YWCA, "History of the Race Relations Committee," 2, typescript, YWCA Papers, box 2, folder 46, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study; Urban League, Annual Reports and Correspondence, 1919-1939, Urban League Papers, XIII-5, IV-28; "Negroes Barred at Art School," *Boston Chronicle*, May 28, 1932, 1; Grace Abbott, Report on Harriet Tubman House, October 19, 1934, Edith and Grace Abbott Papers, University of Chicago, box 32, folder 15; *Boston Transcript*, July 14, 1934, and July 17, 1934 (on the shooting—150 to 200 people rose in protest); *Boston Chronicle*, April 23, 1932, and October 28, 1933, on homemaking classes as the black response to the Depression.

13. Grace Abbott, Report on Boston Settlement Houses, typescript, 2, 14 ff., Edith and Grace Abbott Papers, box 32, folder 14. [Julian Steele], Robert Gould Shaw House, Annual Report, 1932/33, National Federation of Settlements Collection, box 34, folder 341, Social Welfare Archives, University of Minnesota. George Goodman to Hill, September 16, 1938, Urban League Papers, IV-28. The infant mortality rate in 1933 was 110 in 1,000.

14. *Boston Chronicle*, March 26, 1932, and September 3, 1932; *Boston Guardian*, September 23, 1939; they had less success fighting a new Cotton Club run

on the same lines as that of Harlem, in the black district, but excluding black patrons (*Boston Chronicle*, November 13, 1932; April 28, 1933; and March 11, 1933). *Boston Chronicle*, September 17, 1932 (on ward elections). Two particular organizing campaigns were to protest the opening of a pool room in a residential section of Roxbury and to oust their city council representative for refusing to allow part of the local park to be named after a colored war hero.

15. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis* 35 (August 1928): 275.

16. Gamm, *New Deal Democrats*, 91. *Boston Chronicle*, March 26, 1932, 1 (on Mrs. Worthy); July 23, 1932, 1, 8 (on her meeting of 200); April 23, 1932, 1 (on the Federation of Massachusetts Women's Clubs). *Boston Chronicle*, June 3, 1933, 1, "Democratic League Ousts Worthy," referring to Dr., not Mrs. Worthy; all the officers of Rainey's newly constituted league were men—five doctors, four lawyers, and two others. See also *Boston Chronicle*, September 9, 1933, and October 14, 1933. On Mrs. Worthy's patronage successes, see *Boston Chronicle*, August 5, 1933, 1, and September 16, 1933, 1.

17. "Women Learn Politics 'Too Fast' Says Bullock," *Boston Chronicle*, March 19, 1932, 1; and "Our Girls in Roxbury," June 3, 1933, 4. "Civic Leader," *Boston Guardian*, July 27, 1940, 7 (profile of Mrs. Hall). It was Mrs. Edna S. Goodell, in 1932, who would be the first black woman to be named even as an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention. *Boston Chronicle*, March 19, 1932, 1. "Change Ward Committee," *Boston Chronicle*, September 17, 1932, 1. *Boston Guardian*, May 27, 1939, 4 (on multiple black candidates for the ward's city council spot); *Boston Guardian*, August 19, 1939, 1 (on Mrs. Edna Black); *Boston Chronicle*, December 17, 1932, 4 (on gerrymandering); September 3, 10, 17, 1932 (on the Ward 9 Civic League).

The organized presence of strong black women, of course, was nothing new in Boston or elsewhere. They ran powerful auxiliaries to men's organizations, and they ran their own clubs. While the black Elks were a force to be reckoned with among Boston's men, the doings of the female Elks took up as much as three-quarters of a page in the *Boston Guardian*, or almost a tenth of the paper. In addition to running powerful auxiliaries of male organizations, from the G.A.R. to unions, black women ran their own literary clubs, sororities, social welfare societies, charitable groups, church groups, and one female residence. They joined together in the Massachusetts State Union of Women's Clubs and hosted, in 1939, the annual convention of the Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs, bringing 1,500 visitors and 393 voting delegates to Boston. At that meeting, descendants of founders and even a few venerable founding members of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin's Woman's Era Club and what became the National Association of Colored Women (both established in the 1890s) spoke. The speakers included both Ruffin's granddaughter, Constance Ridley Heslip, who had worked at Robert Gould Shaw House in the 1920s and helped arrange discussions for the student YWCA interracial relations group, and Mrs. Maud Cravath Simpson, who not only had had a brief career as an opera star and a

chiroprapist, but who also had helped organize the Woman's Era Club, been its secretary for fourteen consecutive years, helped Monroe Trotter organize the radical Equal Rights League, organized the Massachusetts State Union and became its first president, chaired the anti-lynching committee, was a charter member of the League of Women for Community Service (the soldier's comfort unit, which, like the Women's Service Club, grew into a full-fledged social service organization, with its own building on Massachusetts Avenue, in the 1920s), was registrar of the G.A.R. Ladies, and organized (in the 1930s) Boston's first Townsend Club, which was growing rapidly. On Heslip, see YWCA, "History of the Race Relations Committee"; "Pioneer Women of the Past," *Boston Guardian*, July 22, 1939, 1. On Simpson, see *Boston Guardian*, December 9, 1939, 5. On the Northeastern Federation meeting, see *Boston Guardian*, August 12, 1939, 1. Many of Linda Gordon's findings, presented in "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 559-90, also hold true for Boston, such as the prevalence of married women in these organizations, the presence of businesswomen, the concern over day nurseries, and the range of organizations and strategies (integrationist and separatist) these women pursued.

There was also, by the 1920s and 1930s, almost a kind of proto-yuppie-ism. I don't mean simply that black women practiced business, law, and dentistry, among other professions in Boston: one enterprising black woman opened a boarding school outside Boston, where working mothers could drop off their kids during the week and pick them up on the weekends; Maud Cuney Hare was irritated that once her husband also joined the NAACP, they dropped her professional name (she was in theater), and she became Mrs. William P. Hare; and finally, women pursued higher education after marriage (often to professional men), and, while working, at times they even participated in commuting marriages for the purpose of pursuing their careers. Maud Cuney Hare to NAACP, March 24, 1915, NAACP Papers, II-L-43. On League of Women for Community Service activities, for example, see *Boston Chronicle*, June 18, 1932, 6. Black girls getting high school diplomas in the Boston area outnumbered black boys by three to one in 1932. *Boston Chronicle*, June 25, 1932, 1. Mrs. Blanch Braxton, an attorney in the South End, was the first black woman sworn into practice in the United States court in Massachusetts; see *Boston Chronicle*, June 25, 1933. And the "Housewives League," associated with the Board of Trade (black Boston's equivalent of the chamber of commerce), far from being a women's auxiliary, was filled with businesswomen who also held office in the board, such as its 1939 assistant secretary and 1941 president, Estelle Lee Crosby, a beauty shop owner who also held office as recording secretary in the board. *Boston Guardian*, December 16, 1939, March 9, 1941.

They also joined black men in leading mixed-sex literary and dramatic associations and trade organizations such as the South End Cooperative Bank and the Boston Trade Association. *Boston Guardian*, April 1, 1939. The president of

the Boston Trade Association was Leon G. Lomax; its vice president was beauty shop owner Geneva Arrington.

And there had always been black as well as white women involved in Boston's NAACP. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin had been among the founders in 1911, along with the wealthy, white Mrs. May Hallowell Loud and two white men. Mrs. Mary Evans Wilson, born in 1865, the wife of that nonconfrontational branch president, attorney Butler R. Wilson, and the daughter of an activist in Oberlin, Ohio, not only had been an active executive committee member in the 1910s, but in the 1920s she traveled all over the East and Midwest speaking on behalf of the NAACP. See *Boston Globe*, March 20, 1928; *Boston Guardian*, May 6, 1939. Businesswomen also joined. Mrs. Geneva Arrington might not show up on the NAACP branch executive committee rosters, but funeral parlor director Cora Reid, later Cora Reid MacKerrow, did. So also did women like Mrs. Rosa Brown, who gave her address as the Women's Service Club and served as chairman of the executive board of the Massachusetts State Union of Women's Clubs, and Mrs. Minnie T. Wright, a formidable force in the Daughters of Elks. These women seem to have come onto the executive committee largely in the early 1930s. Reid began to sell tickets to the annual banquet in 1933 and appeared on the executive committee in 1935. Mrs. Wright appeared on the executive committee in 1933, Mrs. Hall in 1929 and Dr. Hall in 1939 (they were never on simultaneously), and Mrs. Brown, along with Constance Ridley, in 1927. In 1927 the board had eleven women and only three men listed; in 1930, however, it had eleven men and five women. See NAACP files for board memberships. On the members' other activities, see, for example, *Boston Chronicle*, April 23, 1932; February 11, 1933, 1.

18. White to Spencer, January 13, 1936, NAACP Papers, I-G-89.

19. Also on the board were Republican attorney Matthew Bullock, who had graduated from Dartmouth College and worked his way through Harvard Law School (1907), recently appointed a penal commissioner of Massachusetts, and Miss Dorothy Snowden, who spent the 1930s as a social worker at various social agencies serving blacks, including the League of Women for Community Service, and getting a law degree at Boston University. Dorch first appeared in the NAACP in 1934, investigating the police shooting of the black janitor referred to earlier. *Boston Guardian*, April 22, 1939 (on Dorch); September 20, 1941, 4 (on Snowden); *Boston Chronicle*, November 11, 1939, 1 (on Bullock).

20. One by one, she described the candidates and their weaknesses: a prominent doctor who had once been brought up on narcotics charges, a West Indian who was, she warned, not a college man though a high Mason, and a minister she simply described as "out positively and absolutely impossible. In the first place a minister is the last choice to consider as President." Spencer to White, January 22, 1936; Spencer to White, January 31, 1936; Cornish to White, February 16, 1936; Spencer to White, February 3, 1936, and February 6, 1936; "Sis" to Walter [White], n.d., Saturday noon; and "Sis" to Walter [White], n.d., in NAACP Papers, I-G-89.

21. She added, "The right white man has so many opportunities to reach the ears of influential legal men whose services are asked for, which the average Negro cannot get," because of a lack of money. "Sis" to Walter [White], n.d., Saturday noon; and Sis to Walter [White], n.d., in NAACP Papers, I-G-89. White urged her to talk candidly with Spencer, though, he admitted to her, "I realize it may be somewhat embarrassing for you to talk to a white person about the character of colored men." She replied, "If in the very near future, you read or hear of one socially prominent being murdered or suddenly disappearing from sight, you'll know it is I."

22. Mrs. Hallowell was vice president of the NAACP branch in the early 1930s, and her son-in-law, Arthur Morse, served as treasurer of the Urban League in the mid-1930s, while his wife, Mrs. Hallowell's daughter, served on the Boston NAACP Executive Committee in 1936. See Urban League and NAACP records at the Library of Congress for the Boston branch.

23. Juanita Jackson to Lewis, March 31, 1936, NAACP Papers, I-G-89. John W. Moors, Mrs. Ethel Moors's husband, left \$10,000 to Shaw House in 1939 and \$5,000 to the Urban League. *Boston Guardian*, June 17, 1939, 4. For other evidence more directly related to white female patronage, see Arthur Morse to Miss Elizabeth Walton regarding Mrs. Moors, October 27, 1925, and George Goodman to Hill, March 5, 1934, in Urban League Papers, IV-28; *Boston Chronicle*, October 22, 1932, 1, and January 30, 1932, 1.

24. In 1944 the YWCA student secretary at the time still clearly recalled the "first time we went into that lovely dining room with Julian Steele." Expecting the worst, she was relieved to note, "nothing alarming happened—only a few looks of surprise as we took an inconspicuous table." Wilson to Chapin, March 31, 1914, NAACP Papers, II-L-43. YWCA, "History of the Race Committee," 3.

25. Sis to White, n.d. February 1936, NAACP Papers, I-G-89; W. E. Harrison, "The Robert Gould Shaw House," *Crisis* 44 (March 1937): 79-80.

26. He had also graduated from Boston Latin, where William Monroe Trotter had chosen him as young people's editor for the *Guardian*; and he served as treasurer of the citywide Boys' Work and a member of the editorial board of *RACE*. W. E. Harrison, "The Robert Gould Shaw House," *Crisis* 44 (March 1937): 79-80.

27. Lewis had first come to the branch's attention when he had defended it against Communist Party attacks at a meeting on the Scottsboro boys in 1931. He wanted to bridge the gap and lessen the animosity between black workers in Boston and exclusionist unions. It was only in 1934 that the garment workers in Boston hired a black organizer and began to admit blacks; and the wildcat longshoremen's strike in Boston in 1931 had led to the displacement of striking white workers by 600 white strikebreakers and 600 black workers the local had excluded. As the International Longshoreman's Union revoked the charter of the local for the strike, the black longshoremen applied in their place. On the longshoremen's strike, see Goodman to Hill, October 22, 1931, Urban League

Papers, IV-28; on the Scottsboro meeting, see Lewis to White, June 18, 1931, NAACP Papers, I-G-88, and Loud to Ovington, February 14, 1931, NAACP Papers, I-G-89. On the branch's elitism, see, for example, Wilson to Nerney, March 20, 1914, NAACP Papers, II-L-43; Pickens to Loud, January 30, 1926, NAACP Papers, I-G-88; memo of the secretary regarding a conversation with Wilson, February 10, 1932, and Lydia to "My dear Walter," n.d. [1933], NAACP Papers, I-G-89, and Lewis to White, n.d. [ca. January 1937], on Lewis's effort to get a cheaper and more informal annual meeting and dinner, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

28. On the anti-injunction bill, see Loud to Johnson, April 12, 1928, NAACP Papers, I-G-89.

29. He also urged the national NAACP to use a black printing shop with a union label. On the Randolph issue, Dorch wrote to White for leverage, but White responded that Randolph was "an excellent speaker" and knew much about the labor aspect of the race problem. Lewis to White, March 18, 1936, April 1936, April 24, 1936, and Dorch to White, December 16, 1936, in NAACP Papers, I-G-89; January 1937 suggested program for 1937 Greater Boston Branch and Lewis to Pickens, January 13, 1938, in NAACP Papers I-G-90.

30. Steele to Hallowell, March 4, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

31. *Amsterdam News*, May 14, 1938; White to Bills, April 15, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

32. Alice Tapley wrote, "Some are for Mr. Steele and some are against him." Alice P. Tapley to Lillian Peck, September 29, 1937, in the National Federation of Settlements Collection, box 34, folder 341. Tapley also admitted, "I suppose the neighborhood would not endorse a white worker," and asked Peck whether she knew of any positions to which Steele might go. *Amsterdam News*, May 14, 1938. See also Julian Denegal Steele Collection, box 3, Main Library, Boston University, letters largely favorable and some antagonistic to the marriage and his headship. White to Dorch, May 31, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. White blamed Dorch for the attack: "The spreading of this poisonous material cannot help but do a good deal of harm." Dorch, fairly enough, claimed Bilbo would have gotten his hands on the material in any case.

33. For example, *Boston Chronicle*, December 31, 1932, and October 13, 1933.

34. On Ruffin's organization, see Darlene Clark Hine, "'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': The Philanthropic Work of Black Women," in Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 73, 86, and *Boston Guardian*, July 15, 1939. On a tradition of female anti-lynching activity in Boston, see, for example, Wilson to Nash, September 5, 1916, NAACP Papers, II-L-43, and the *Hartford Courant*, March 5, 1917. See also *Boston Chronicle*, May 7, 1932, 1, 4. The iconography of the day also worked against them. In the late 1930s, the images that filled the fashion pages of the Boston black press were still almost entirely white. The beauty shop owners that dominated the papers'

advertising relied on selling products to produce hair that looked like white people's hair.

35. Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the Boston branch, May 19, 1937, and September 22, 1937, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. On the anti-intermarriage bill, see secretary to Wilson, February 11, 1926; Wilson to Johnson, February 7, 1927, NAACP Papers, I-G-88. See also "The NAACP Battlefront," *Crisis* 35 (February 1928): 50. The NAACP successfully fought off such laws in six northern states where they had been introduced in 1927.

36. *Boston Chronicle*, February 13, 1932. Boston continued to organize new interracial groups throughout this era. See, for example, *Boston Chronicle*, July 16, 1932, 4; February 18, 1933, 4.

37. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis* (January 1929): 22.

38. *Amsterdam News*, May 14, 1939. See also *Boston Guardian*, January 21, 1939, 4. To the black press, Steele, not Dawes, was clearly the issue. Her name was rarely mentioned. And he almost openly confronted the whole complex, from his walking into the YWCA in 1928, to his press photograph. Most prominent black men appear in the black press in dark suits, solemn-faced, usually in a head shot. Steele appears in a light three-piece suit, smiling confidently, leaning back in his chair, posture open.

39. Du Bois devoted several pages of the next two issues to printing letters of black and white women and men across the country. "Countee Cullen on Miscegenation," *Crisis* 36 (November 1929): 373; "About Marrying," *Crisis* 37 (January 1930): 28; "Inter-marriage: A Symposium," *Crisis* 37 (March 1930): 89-90; Rheba Cain, "Dark Lover," *Crisis* 35 (April 1929): 123, 137, 138. In 1939 Mrs. M. Cravath Simpson took to task a Brookline man for wanting to deny Frederick Douglass the honor of a place in a postal stamp series because of Douglass's interracial marriage. Her own parents and she in her early life, she claimed, would have agreed, but by the time she, in her role as NACW member, took over the care of Douglass's home from his widow, she had, as she put it, "grown broader in my views, thank God." *Boston Guardian*, June 24, 1939, 1.

40. Bliss to White, April 14, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90; *Boston Guardian*, April 29, 1939; March 11, 1939; May 6, 1939. In January of the same year Steele had presented his "Interracial Progress" plan to a national NYA conference in Washington, D.C., as a delegate of the Massachusetts NYA. *Boston Guardian*, January 14, 1939, 1.

41. White memo, April 14, 1939; White to Dorch, April 9, 1938, and April 18, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. *Amsterdam News*, May 14, 1938.

42. White to Dorch, February 9, 1937, and, for example, Minutes of the Executive Meeting, March 10, 1937, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. On confidence in Dorch, Florence Lewis to White, n.d. [ca. December 1938] and George Murphy to White, May 24, 1939, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

43. Dorch to White, June 1, 1938; White to Dorch, March 29, 1938.

44. Dorch to White, April 15, 1938; Bliss to White, April 14, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

45. Goodman to Marshall, June 14, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90. Despite the bitter hostility between Communists and Socialists, other Bostonians often confused them with each other. The rise of the left had been strongly felt among black Bostonians, to the extent that it was Democrats who offered themselves as an alternative to the Communists and not the other way around, for those in flight from the Republican Party. *Boston Chronicle*, March 5, 1932, 4.

46. *Boston Chronicle*, June 18, 1938, 1. On p. 4 of the same issue an editorial declared that the function of the NAACP was not to be an interracial marriage bureau. The leftist *Guardian*, on the other hand, called for a purge of the NAACP's lukewarm leaders, June 16, 1938. White to Houston, June 20, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

47. The foundation was sponsored by Mrs. John W. Bartol, Alfred Baker-Lewis, and George W. Paine. The last two ran for office on the Socialist Party ticket. *Boston Guardian*, December 2, 1939, 4. Florence Luscomb, a white leftist labor activist, and Maud Trotter Steward, the sister of William Monroe Trotter and the editor of the *Boston Guardian* after his death in 1934, were also Steele supporters. See, for example, Special Meeting Minutes, June 22, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90, and Alfred Baker Lewis to Florence Luscomb, June 2, 1938, Luscomb Papers, box 11, folder 247. Steele's great forte, according to Juanita Jackson, was getting large contributions from wealthy people. Jackson memo to Committee on Administration, April 22, 1938, NAACP Papers, I-G-90.

II

The Last Hurrah *and the Pluralist Vision of American Politics*



JAMES J. CONNOLLY

ALL CHARACTERS AND SITUATIONS in this novel are fictional and any resemblance to any persons living or dead is purely coincidental," reads the disclaimer in the frontmatter of *The Last Hurrah*, Edwin O'Connor's celebrated 1956 novel of Irish politics. These are perhaps the only lines in the book that no reader believed true. Critics, lay readers, and scholars immediately assumed that O'Connor had written a thinly disguised depiction of Boston politics and saw the book's main character, the aging Irish mayor Frank Skeffington, as James Michael Curley. Most agreed that the book offered an authentic glimpse of how machine politicians provided for the needs of immigrant working-class voters in a personal, culturally sensitive manner. This interpretation of *The Last Hurrah*—and of machine politics more generally—prevailed when the book first appeared and persisted for several decades after.

The popular embrace of Skeffington and his style of politics overlooked the novel's subtlety. Skeffington, as O'Connor insisted, was not simply Curley with a different name. There were substantial differences in both personal and political terms. More significantly, *The Last Hurrah* was not simply a celebration of the benevolence of bosses and machines, as many readers have assumed. O'Connor intimate Arthur Schlesinger Jr. insisted, quite properly, that those who see the book as a romanticized defense of old-style politics have "misconstrued" it. While Skeffington was and is an attractive and immensely entertaining figure, O'Connor sought to create a character that was more complex than stereotypes about charming, rogue bosses can encompass. The book presents Skeffington's rougher edges, hints at his cynicism, and alludes to his corruption, although it explores many of these traits obliquely.¹

Most readers overlooked these complexities because they viewed the

book through the lens of mid-twentieth-century American social thought. O'Connor's supposedly sentimental portrayal of the disappearing world of ethnic machine politics helped defang the Tammany-Tiger image of big-city, immigrant-dominated public life at just the moment when second-generation European ethnics were entering mainstream American life. The story made it possible to celebrate an ethnic political tradition as benevolent—and thus morally valid—where it had once been seen as a corrupt and anti-democratic force. Such a representation also offered supporting evidence for the then emerging functional interpretation of the urban machine, which constituted a key part of the pluralist theory of American politics that emerged after World War II. The popular oversimplification of the book thus prevailed because it resonated so powerfully in 1950s American culture.

The purpose of this essay is not to rehabilitate the literary reputation of O'Connor's book, although I do think it was more sophisticated than most people have realized. As biographer Hugh Rank has argued, "The extent of O'Connor's achievement has been concealed, ironically, by his own subtlety in craftsmanship and by his complexity of vision." In the case of *The Last Hurrah*, he adds, readers have "rejoiced in its Gaelic exuberance without recognizing its detached, sometimes cynical view of the Irish in America." My purpose, rather, is to explore why *The Last Hurrah* was read the way it was and why this work of fiction has so often been accepted as an accurate picture of both Boston's and America's ethnic politics during the century that preceded World War II.²

THE LAST HURRAH'S PLOT centered on the observations of Skeffington's politically naïve nephew, Adam, who follows his uncle around an unnamed city during what would be his last campaign for mayor. In the process, he receives a behind-the-scenes view of a disappearing world of backroom deals, Irish wakes, and ethnic feuding. As the campaign unfolds, Skeffington battles a young, telegenic but vacuous opponent backed by a coalition of the elderly mayor's enemies. The story acknowledges Skeffington's corruption and hunger for power, but dwells more explicitly on his generosity and frankness. The upstart wins, much to the bewilderment of the boss and his lieutenants, signaling the demise of the clientelism that had supposedly defined ethnic politics for several generations. On election night, the mayor suffers a heart attack as he returns home, and he dies shortly thereafter. In the novel's most famous scene, a dying, apparently comatose Skeffington overhears one of his

critics declare that the mayor would have done things differently if he had the chance to start again. "The hell I would," he suddenly replied, just before passing on.³

Skeffington's epitaph underscored the humor, defiance, and pragmatic sense of morality that made him an attractive figure to so many readers. The initial reaction to the book focused on these traits. Marketing materials from his publisher, Little, Brown and Co., described Skeffington as "half hero, half rascal," a depiction many reviewers echoed. *Time* magazine characterized him as "a lovable rogue—a combination of Santa Claus, Robin Hood, a Chinese Warlord, and the late John Barrymore." The Book-of-the-Month Club, which made the novel one of its featured selections, noted Skeffington's corruptness but insisted it was "mitigated by a genuine benevolence toward his people and a perfect understanding of their problems." Even those who criticized the book zeroed in on its apparent overemphasis on the hero's benevolence. Writing in the *New Yorker*, critic Anthony West claimed the book offered an "overly sentimental" portrait of the boss that made him a "fairy godmother of widows and orphans."⁴

Hollywood cemented this view in a movie version of the book. Directed by John Ford and starring Spencer Tracy, the 1958 film treated Skeffington even more warmly. It reduced his corruption to a minor element of the story and celebrated the charm and benevolence of the lead character. The film was so kind to Skeffington, a *New York Times* critic wrote, "that one searches in vain for a reason why anyone would think him a rogue. . . . It is safe to expect that Edwin O'Connor's highly touted political character, Skeffington, will repeat in an overwhelming landslide as the People's Choice this year."⁵

Most commentators not only accepted the sentimental reading of *The Last Hurrah*, they deemed it realistic. Clifton Fadiman, in the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, saw Skeffington as a "Robin Hood" but also claimed he was a representative "type." Howard Mumford Jones argued in the *Saturday Review* that "no American novel throws into clearer light the operations of the personal machines built up by these political geniuses" and shows the failure of the "Old Americans" to recognize that "politics is built upon personalized and family relationships." It was a book, he added, "for anyone who wanted to know how American politics really operated." The *Christian Science Monitor* pronounced the book a "genuine portrait" not only of the boss but of the "Irish-American

community." Writing in *Commonweal*, Joe Dever claimed the book was of "major significance as a sociological novel of the big city in America."⁶

Even scholars have taken this romanticized version of the boss at face value. Accepting the popular verdict that *The Last Hurrah* was a *roman à clef* about Boston and that its lead character was in fact Curley, they have generally treated the book as an authentic account of the benevolence of machine politics. A 1957 review in the *Midwest Journal of Political Science* treated the novel as light fiction and had only mild complaints about the accuracy of its depiction of the urban political life of the preceding generation. Subsequent academic comment confirmed that judgment, almost routinely citing the book as a source of "authentic and fascinating detail about 'inside politics.'" As recently as 1992, one political scientist praised O'Connor for recognizing "that politics is inextricably bound up with the personal needs, yearnings, and fantasies of its participants." A "Last Hurrah thesis" developed as well, alluding to an explanation of Skeffington's demise offered by a character in the book: the usurpation of the social welfare functions of the machine by the New Deal.⁷

These scholars appear to have relied on the prevailing interpretation of the book rather than a close reading of the text. O'Connor, who told Arthur Schlesinger that the downfall of machine politics "seemed to him inevitable and in the public interest," incorporated his doubts about its value into the narrative. Skeffington was more than just a colorful rogue; he was capable of deceiving and manipulating people and grew ill tempered when faced with defeat. His vaunted personalism was often a front, as O'Connor suggests early in the book when the mayor placates a widowed constituent with a series of platitudes and generalities that gives the impression that he knew her and her family. While many of Skeffington's fiercest critics are unattractive caricatures—the stingy Brahmin, the self-made and self-righteous lace-curtain Irishman—O'Connor's more realistic and human characters, such as Yankee lawyer Nathaniel Gardiner and liberal intellectual Jack Mangan, refused to support him, even though they admired him personally. In several instances, O'Connor pauses his narrative to explore these conflicting views of Skeffington and his achievements, a device that suggests the complex moral calculus needed to judge machine politics. One perceptive reviewer noted that although the reader is possibly "given too little information about Skeffington's misdeeds to form an accurate opinion of the man's

moral stature . . . perhaps O'Connor's point is that such a man will always be morally ambiguous."⁸

O'Connor's reaction to another popular account of Irish American politics, John Henry Cutler's biography of Curley contemporary and rival John F. Fitzgerald, underscored his disdain for merely sentimental treatments of the subject. Published in 1960, *"Honey Fitz": Three Steps to the White House* sought to capitalize on the ascension of Fitzgerald's grandson, John F. Kennedy, to the presidency. O'Connor declared it a "badly written" and "servile" book. Fitzgerald was "an extremely interesting man" who deserved "serious and detailed attention," but Cutler had written a "romance" instead of a biography. "What emerges from his pages is not Fitzgerald nor, indeed, any man at all," O'Connor charged. "It is instead a queer creature of invention, half noble, half-clown, crusader and leprechaun squeezed together into one unearthly amalgam." In language that might well apply to Skeffington, O'Connor wrote of Fitzgerald, "He was a skilled and shrewdly sentimental campaigner; in and out of office he did many things for the betterment of his constituents, and in the process he did not neglect himself."⁹

As his reaction to *"Honey Fitz"* suggests, O'Connor's ambitions extended beyond popular sentimentality. His goal as a writer, he later explained, was to do for Irish America what Faulkner had done for the South. *The Last Hurrah* was the first of three novels designed to achieve this end. *The Edge of Sadness*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel focusing on the experiences of an Irish priest and recovering alcoholic, followed in 1961. *All in the Family*, a third novel focusing on Irish American themes, appeared in 1966. The story of the Kinsellas, a well-to-do Irish family with a younger son who enters politics, the book returned to the familiar subject of politics. But it was less concerned with the machinations of public life than with the inner workings of a prominent family and the changes wrought by Americanization and socioeconomic success. By most accounts, O'Connor's second and third books were more substantial literary achievements that reflected his maturation as a writer. *The Last Hurrah*, though less impressive in these terms, nonetheless constituted a serious, critical examination of urban politics and the Irish American experience.¹⁰

The cultural currents of mid-twentieth-century America made it easy to overlook the subtleties of *The Last Hurrah*. At a time when the ethnic distinctions that defined early-twentieth-century American public life had lost much of their authority, a novel that seemed to document and

endorse a once suspect political subculture underscored the growing acceptance of varied traditions under the umbrella of a plural society. A vision of the United States as a nation composed of many ethnic groups gained wide currency after World War II and peaked during the 1950s. The celebration of ethnic politics that accompanied O'Connor's novel reflected this wider acceptance of ethnic and religious subcultures, particularly those of European origin. The march of second- and third-generation ethnics to middle-class suburbs during the postwar boom also encouraged an embrace of machine politics. As descendants of European immigrants entered into mainstream, plural America, the experiences of their parents and grandparents became a subject for mass-market nostalgia that reinforced a plural understanding of American society. That O'Connor's story and his take on Skeffington were more nuanced than the popular reaction to the book allowed mattered little in this context, as the response itself took on a life of its own.

The book's emphasis on the demise of machine politics made its subject less threatening. In its title, in its plot, and through other devices, *The Last Hurrah* makes clear that the political world of Skeffington and his contemporaries had passed. The reason Skeffington's nephew Adam accompanies him through the campaign and thus narrates the story is to witness the world of machine politics before it disappears altogether. The book ends with Skeffington's defeat and death, signaling that his style of politics no longer worked. His bewilderment upon facing defeat highlighted the degree to which O'Connor saw politicians of his sort out of step with the political and social milieu of postwar America. O'Connor employed anthropological terms to make the political world of the urban Irish seem almost premodern. Taken aback by the frankly political dimension of the Irish wake he attended, Adam finally realized he was an "alien guest" who, "once ashore . . . lost no time in the uninformed criticism of the customs of the land in which he found himself." The Irish, Skeffington explained to him at another point, were a "tribe," and as such had certain "tribal customs." Skeffington even labeled himself a "tribal chieftain." By contrast, his opposition was a distinctly modern, media-savvy operation, skillfully manipulating television images to appeal to a mass electorate. In these and other ways, the novel reminded its readers that machine politics was no longer a force to be reckoned with and now the political assimilation of Irish Americans was complete.¹¹

Two engines of American mass culture reinforced the embrace of the

Irish and their now-expired political traditions that *The Last Hurrah* described. The Book-of-the-Month Club, arbiter of middle-class and middlebrow tastes, made O'Connor's novel a featured selection. The Club's judges sought books that were both substantive and entertaining, as Janice Radway has demonstrated, a balance that *The Last Hurrah* struck effectively. Its promotional literature pronounced the book "a dextrous study of Irish Americans" and thus worthwhile reading. But it also stressed its humor and Skeffington's benevolence, steering readers away from more careful consideration of its complexity. In doing so, the Club advanced the overly simplistic interpretation of O'Connor's novel as an unqualified endorsement of old-style ethnic politics and placed the considerable weight of its marketing machine behind it.¹²

The film version of *The Last Hurrah* had a similar impact. Irish American director John Ford drained from the movie any sense of O'Connor's subtle, ambivalent take on Skeffington and boss politics generally. Cluttered with affectionately presented ethnic stereotypes, the film reduced the book's plot to little more than sugary nostalgia. (O'Connor reported that it made him nauseated.) The choice of Spencer Tracy—who despite his Irish antecedents was one of the quintessential white, middle-class leading men of the day—to play Skeffington gave the lead character a distinctly mainstream persona, shorn of ethnic accent or affect. One need only pause briefly to consider the unsubstantiated Hollywood rumor that Jackie Gleason was going to get the Skeffington role to grasp the impact Tracy's portrayal had. Few actors could have more effectively signaled the acceptance of colorful bosses as archetypal figures within American popular culture.¹³

O'Connor himself saw the popularity of his novel as a phenomenon divorced from its literary merit. He attributed its reception to the fact that it came out in an election year, that its subject matter was unique, and especially to the strenuous effort of James Michael Curley to claim Skeffington's persona as his own. Although O'Connor insisted otherwise, and although the former Boston mayor initially threatened to sue for libel, Curley claimed that he and Skeffington were interchangeable. The publicity he generated by insisting so returned him to the limelight during the final years of his life and prompted him to produce an autobiography (ghostwritten by John Henry Cutler) that borrowed shamelessly from O'Connor's novel. The memoir's title, *I'd Do It Again*, was a reprisal of Skeffington's famous deathbed declaration. The book borrowed liberally from the characterization of O'Connor's novel; Curley even la-

beled himself a "tribal chieftain," a phrase lifted directly from *The Last Hurrah*. O'Connor once wrote that he wanted to discuss his book with Curley but never did. He attributed this failure to the fact that they had both "become too preoccupied with our own activities: I with my book, he with my book."¹⁴

Curley's appropriation of Skeffington was more than a simple case of life imitating art. It encouraged readers to interpret the book as both real and realistic, and it steered them away from a more careful analysis of it as a work of fiction. It became an easy game to match characters in the book with real-life figures from Boston public life: Skeffington with Curley, the archbishop with Cardinal O'Connell, rival candidate Kevin McCluskey with Maurice Tobin, and so on. In the same vein, specific scenes gained credibility as accurate portrayals of ethnic political culture. The Irish wake that was cultural ritual and political rally simultaneously, the line of favor seekers that formed outside the mayor's door each morning, the exploitation of ethnic tensions, the highly organized machine, and other elements of the plot carried with them an authority that may not have materialized if the book had not been viewed as a *roman à clef*.

The Last Hurrah's role in defining Curley's Robin-Hood reputation was in many respects a final episode in the former mayor's long-running effort to define his political persona. From the earliest stages of his career, he had adroitly crafted an image of himself as a friend of the common man, never missing an opportunity to dramatize that idea. He was convicted in 1903 of taking a civil service examination for an illiterate constituent, a black mark that would have sunk a lesser politician. But Curley turned it into a badge of honor, claiming he willingly served two months in jail for trying to help a poor man with children to feed. He made sure other such favors earned broad publicity as well, repeatedly reinforcing his reputation as a politician who, as one Boston voter explained in 1910, "had a heart and mind willing to suffer for the oppressed." Becoming Skeffington revived this persona one more time, ratifying Curley's image as a benevolent boss.¹⁵

The Last Hurrah's unintentional rehabilitation of Curley in particular and the big-city boss in general represented the triumph of a vision of the machine as a benevolent force. Subject to withering criticism from elite reformers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, urban party politicians had responded by attempting to reshape their image in the popular mind for more than half a century. Curley was

among the most adroit in this regard, but he was not the only revisionist. His peers in other cities assiduously promoted the idea that, whatever their flaws, they were practical leaders who served the interests of their immigrant constituents honestly and humanely. Journalists such as Lincoln Steffens and Progressive-era reformers such as Jane Addams amplified this argument when it suited their own agendas. By the middle of the twentieth century, as the children and grandchildren of immigrants entered the middle class in growing numbers, the campaign to remake the city boss had succeeded, replacing the nineteenth-century portrait of a corrupt, self-interested demagogue with a depiction of a pragmatic, kindly, and fundamentally honest character.

This new vision of the boss and the machine won adherents in scholarly circles as well. *The Last Hurrah's* frequent emphasis on the personal aspect of Skeffington's political method fit neatly with the functional interpretation of machine politics proffered by Robert Merton, Oscar Handlin, and Richard Hofstadter. Writing in 1947, sociologist Merton proposed the idea that political machines persisted despite their evident corruption because they performed latent functions. One of these was the provision of a range of social services for needy immigrants—a job, a turkey at Christmas, bail money—in a humane, personal manner that differed sharply from the cold, impersonal style of the reformer. A number of historians adopted this illustration of functionalist theory as fact, most notably Oscar Handlin, who reproduced Merton's explanation of the success of boss politics in *The Uprooted*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning study of the immigrant experience, with little additional evidence. Published in 1951, Handlin's study in turn shaped Richard Hofstadter's 1956 portrayal of modern American politics, *The Age of Reform*, also a Pulitzer winner. O'Connor's portrayal of the rise and fall of Frank Skeffington clearly drew on these ideas and seemed all the more convincing for being in step with recent research.¹⁶

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the scholarly revision of the city boss and his machine was the failure of its proponents to offer credible supporting evidence. Merton cited just one specific example of the latent functions performed by the boss, the supposed credo of Boston ward boss (and Curley rival) Martin Lomasney. "I think that there's got to be in every ward somebody that any bloke can come to—no matter what he's done—and get help," Lomasney reportedly claimed. "Help, you understand; none of your law and your justice, but help." Leaving aside the self-serving nature of the statement, its provenance alone

makes it unreliable. The source of the comment was not Lomasney himself, but muckraker Lincoln Steffens, who cited a private conversation with the boss in his *Autobiography*. Steffens, as Christopher Lasch and others have demonstrated, was hardly a trustworthy source. His intent was to shock his readers by inverting conventional moral assumptions throughout the memoir. Thus Lomasney became a practical, benevolent, and even progressive figure instead of a corrupt boss, while his reform enemies became hypocritical defenders of the status quo. Merton's intent was simply to provide an illustration of his theory of latent functionalism, not to document the workings of the political machine. Nevertheless Handlin, Hofstadter, and their successors drew on it, citing the same Lomasney quote, supplemented with little else, save material from equally suspect sources such as William Riordon's *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*.¹⁷

O'Connor's fiction sometimes filled the vacuum created by the absence of legitimate historical evidence. One political scientist cited a scene from the book in which Skeffington helps a poor widow as an "unimpeachable transcript" of how a machine politician provided personalized service to a constituent. It was "nearly inconceivable," he added, that "this small exchange would be recorded in a study of machine politics in urban America." There was no way to get at it except through fiction. (He completely overlooked O'Connor's more subtle point that Skeffington was merely feigning a personal connection to the woman.) *The Last Hurrah* became a valuable addition to the literature on bosses and machines because it supposedly showed us how they operated in a way that the usual social scientific literature either did not or could not.¹⁸

The success of the functional theory of boss politics, and with it the acceptance of *The Last Hurrah* as authentic, flowed less from its validity as social science than from its fit with pluralist theory. An explanation of how modern American politics worked that dominated intellectual life during the 1950s, pluralism conceived of politics in the United States as a competition among a plethora of interests. This competition was roughly equal and worked best when politicians worked pragmatically to serve the concrete interests of their supporters, which were balanced by the give and take of democratic politics. It worked less successfully when a group attempted to impose its values without compromise. Ideological reformers best exemplified this sort of moralistic—some called it irrational—political activism. Practitioners of the more realistic style included

Franklin Roosevelt and big-city bosses. The thrust of this explanation flowed from the ideological exigencies of the Cold War, as Terrence McDonald has persuasively argued. It provided an American political tradition defined by hardheaded pragmatism that was distinct from the irrational, ideological character of communism on the left and fascism on the right. The scholarship of Merton, Handlin, and Hofstadter and the fiction of O'Connor all served this agenda and benefited from it.¹⁹

Both the popular and academic responses to *The Last Hurrah* helped uncouple the boss from the moral baggage he had carried since the nineteenth century. Linked to ignorant, corruptible immigrants, machine politics had long been viewed as morally suspect. O'Connor and his social scientific counterparts helped rehabilitate the boss and machine by making them an expression of an alternative yet legitimate set of values—part of the pluralistic nature of American public life. As political scientist Eric McKittrick noted in 1957, the success of O'Connor's novel reflected the development of a more relaxed attitude toward political machines and the recognition that they performed "certain stabilizing functions." Pluralism provided a theoretical underpinning for this embrace of old-style ethnic politics as a legitimate expression of one of the many cultures within American society. *The Last Hurrah* furthered the process because, in the words of Boston literary critic Shaun O'Connell, it "dramatize[d] a reconciliation . . . between America's common readers and the previously suspect world of Irish-American politics."²⁰

Viewed in this context, the popular interpretation of O'Connor's novel signaled the triumph of the political vision of nineteenth-century urban politicians. They depicted machine politics as inclusive, practical, democratic, and humane—as a politics suited to an ethnically plural society. Succeeding generations of politicians helped win the acceptance of this idea of how politics worked with a boost from social reformers, journalists, and the machinery of mass culture. A generation of mid-twentieth-century scholars—many the descendants of immigrants themselves—expanded and elevated this vision into a theory of how American public life should operate, one that resonated powerfully within the ideological currents of the era. That a reading of *The Last Hurrah* as an unabashed celebration of a distinctively ethnic brand of politics prevailed over the more ambivalent portrait on bosses and machine that O'Connor intended reflects just how thoroughly the plural vision of American politics and society had penetrated the nation's culture.²¹

The misreading of *The Last Hurrah* came with certain costs. The book's acceptance as an authentic account of Boston's political culture helped steer attention away from critical aspects of the city's history. As historian Thomas O'Connor has noted, O'Connor's fiction has at times served as a substitute for careful analysis of the city's political past.²² More broadly, the eagerness with which so many Americans embraced *The Last Hurrah* as a celebration of machine politics helped obscure the range of civic activism that circulated in ethnic America. Working-class immigrants and the politicians who represented them developed their own reform visions, often in opposition to party bosses. Scholars studying immigrant politics have described a variety of distinctive ideologies, including a "working class Americanism," a "moral capitalism," and a self-consciously ethnic version of "new nationalism."²³ We risk dehumanizing ethnics when we assume that their politics amounted to little more than an exchange of votes for services, however personal the help may have been. As new research on urban public life provides a deeper, fuller understanding of ethnic political cultures, perhaps we can now return to *The Last Hurrah* and begin to recognize and appreciate O'Connor's novel as socially engaged literature instead of treating it merely as history.

Notes

1. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., introduction to *The Best and Last of Edwin O'Connor* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 13.
2. Hugh Rank, *Edwin O'Connor* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 9.
3. Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1956), 401.
4. Rank, *Edwin O'Connor*, 91; *New Yorker* 31 (February 11, 1956): 113.
5. *New York Times*, quoted in Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 521.
6. Clifton Fadiman, "Report on *The Last Hurrah*," *Book-of-the-Month Club News* (January 1956), Edwin O'Connor Papers, Boston Public Library, item 322; *Saturday Review* 39, no. 5 (February 4, 1956), O'Connor Papers, item 326; *Christian Science Monitor*, February 9, 1956, 7; Joe Dever, "Review of *The Last Hurrah*," *Commonweal* 63 (March 9, 1956): 601.
7. James F. Davidson, "Review of *The Ninth Wave*, *The New Men*, *The Last Hurrah*," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 2 (August 1957): 188-89; Gordon Milne, *The American Political Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 167; George Von der Muhll, "The Political Element in Literature," in *Reading Political Stories: Representations of Politics in Novels and Pictures*, ed.

Maureen Whitebrook (Lanham, Md.: Rowan Littlefield, 1992). On the Last Hurrah thesis, see Bruce Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 21 n. 37.

8. O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah*, 12, 409-17; Paul Pickrel, "Politicians, Soldiers, and Hittites," clipping in O'Connor Papers, item 324.

9. Edwin O'Connor, "Review of Honey Fitz," typescript in O'Connor Papers, item 49.

10. Schlesinger, introduction to *The Best and Last of Edwin O'Connor*.

11. O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah*, 195, 216.

12. Fadiman, "Report on *The Last Hurrah*," 2.

13. Harry Cohn to Edwin O'Connor, November 16, 1956, O'Connor Papers, item 113. My thanks to Ronald Formisano for pointing out the significance of the choice of Tracy for the film's lead role.

14. James Michael Curley, *I'd Do It Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 1; Edwin O'Connor, "James Michael Curley and the Last Hurrah," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1961): 49.

15. James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 136-39, quotation from *South Boston Gazette*, September 24, 1910. See also Beatty, *The Rascal King*.

16. Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure: Toward the Codification of Theory and Research* (New York: Glencoe, 1949); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, 2d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 190-94; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 181. See also Terrence McDonald, "The Problem of the Political in Recent American Urban History: Liberalism and the Rise of Urban Functionalism," *Social History* 10 (1985): 328-36.

17. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 128. See also McDonald, "Problem of the Political," and idem, introduction to *George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, by William Riordon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1993).

18. Von der Muhll, "The Political Element in Literature," 44.

19. McDonald, "Problem of the Political," 328-36. See also Michael P. Rogin and John L. Shover, *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970).

20. Shaun O'Connell, *Imagining Boston: A Literary Landscape* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 127.

21. Eric L. McKittrick, "The Study of Corruption," *Political Science Quarterly* 72 (December 1957): 503.

22. Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), xix.

23. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*; Maureen Flanagan, *Charter Reform in Chicago* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press,

1987); John D. Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 108–28.

*The Failure of Catholic Interracialism in
Boston before Busing*



WILLIAM LEONARD

THIS ESSAY EXAMINES the history of Catholic interracial activity in Boston from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. These years saw the formation of associations to promote racial justice and tolerance among Boston's Catholics. Organizations like Boston's Catholic Interracial Council, the Association of Boston Urban Priests, Black Catholics in Action, and the Association of Urban Sisters were all founded at a time when Boston's racial climate was deteriorating. These organizations demonstrated both the promises and the pitfalls of organizing the city's Catholics to confront racism and urban decay. By the time court-ordered busing came to Boston in September 1974, these organizations either ceased to exist or proved to be ineffectual in changing the racial attitudes of the majority of Boston's Catholics. The next several years in Boston were marked by violence and a general animosity between black and white—usually Catholic—Bostonians.¹ The church's interracial message failed to reach many of those Catholics directly affected by court-ordered busing. As a result, Boston witnessed some of its worst racial violence in a century.

By the late 1950s, under Archbishop Richard Cushing's direction, the Archdiocese of Boston took an increasingly public stance against racial intolerance and discrimination. Inner-city problems were increasingly seen as issues of poverty and racial injustice by the archdiocese. Prior to then, little interracial activity existed between white and black Catholic Bostonians. Much of the church's earlier racial efforts were strictly directed toward the small population of black Catholics that had been part of the archdiocese since the eighteenth century. Primarily white religious orders, such as the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the Josephites, came into the archdiocese with an apostolate limited to baptized Catho-

lics and those blacks looking to convert. Very little truly interracial activity existed between white and black Catholic Bostonians during the first half of the twentieth century. This began to change, however, particularly after the push by black Catholics to establish their own parish, St. Richard's, in 1946, and the elevation of Richard Cushing as Boston's bishop.² Many of the city's black Catholics made establishing better race relations between whites and blacks an important goal; they also wanted to prod the hierarchy into addressing urban issues. These efforts soon found support within the church and laity, both black and white.

In 1951 members of Boston's primarily Protestant African American community called upon the archdiocese to form an interracial council.³ Six years later, lay people, black and white, along with members of the clergy, finally organized the Boston Catholic Interracial Council (CIC) with the help of Msgr. Francis J. Lally, editor of the *Pilot*, the archdiocesan newspaper.⁴ Councils had been organized by clergy and lay Catholics since the 1930s in a number of other American cities, but not in Boston. They were formed to promote racial understanding between white and black Americans, particularly Catholics.⁵ Between 1957 and 1963 the council seems to have accomplished little and was in need of reorganization and revitalization. In 1963 the *Pilot* pointed out that the council had been "reaching out into the community and involving people on an ever widening scale in its program of education and action" for a number of years. At the same time, the *Pilot* noted the CIC had attracted "members who already feel strongly on the race question and whose views are already favorably set" and wondered if their efforts would do much good in the long run. Instead the paper called for "some action on a parish level" that would "spark interest and in some measure sustain" the movement. Editors of the *Pilot* called for "discussion groups, especially among young people, before unhappy social prejudices" set in. The *Pilot* reminded its readers "that interracial justice is not just a matter of opinion among Catholics, it is a commitment basic to their Christian doctrine."⁶

The CIC reorganized itself in January 1963 in an effort to attract badly needed lay participation. Its chaplain said, "This new look in Catholic Action within the Catholic Interracial Council will be of great interest to the apostolic layman who is seeking a way to serve his community and will unquestionably encourage him to join the movement."⁷ In June 1963 the council launched an archdiocesan-wide parish-level program "to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination in both the Catholic community and the community at large." The CIC saw its "first task to be

that of informing Catholics on the moral aspects of the race question and alerting their consciences to the demands of the Faith in this regard." That same month the CIC, along with Protestant and Jewish groups within Boston, called for a "Day of Atonement for neglect of the human rights of the Negro members of our society."⁸

In August 1963 members of the Boston CIC traveled to Washington, D.C., to be with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and hundreds of thousands of other black and white Americans at a march for "jobs and freedom." A number of Catholic bishops from around the country participated in the event.⁹ Eleven priests from the Boston archdiocese joined them, including three from Roxbury parishes. On the eve of the march, Cushing labeled Catholics who were prejudiced against blacks as "slackers in the army of the Church Militant."¹⁰

In 1964 the CIC chose David S. Nelson as its president. He was an African American Catholic, a native of Roxbury, a former parishioner at St. Richard's, and a graduate of both Boston College and Boston College Law School. Nelson, a community activist, was brought in to reinvigorate the organization at a time of increasing racial tensions in Boston over housing, jobs, and schools. Nelson made plans, pending a successful fundraising drive in the fall of 1964, to hire an executive director and make the CIC an independent organization, not under archdiocesan control. Doing so would allow the organization to be more outspoken and take positions on issues that the church hierarchy might be unwilling to do.¹¹

The CIC found a generally supportive hierarchy for most of the 1960s. Cushing, usually through Msgr. Lally and the *Pilot*, repeatedly called for racial tolerance and harmony in Boston, condemning those who promoted racism. Cushing supported passage of the 1964 civil rights bill before Congress and continued to speak out against the substandard living and economic conditions of many African American Bostonians. Cushing noted the high unemployment and overall marginalization of blacks in the city, a situation many in the archdiocese correctly felt could only lead to more problems.¹²

While Cushing made the right pronouncements on racial issues, some white Catholic Bostonians were not listening. When the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) entered a float in the 1964 St. Patrick's Day parade in South Boston, for example, its members did not get a good reception from some of the spectators. The float was the target of tomatoes, cans, and bottles. CIC members

were upset over the incident. The next year the CIC decided "to sponsor a marching group" in the parade. Members of the council "believed that the presence of such a group will help underscore . . . our conviction that a practical concern for racial justice is an essential mandate of our faith." In a letter to their members, the CIC planned "to enter as large a group as possible." They intended to display banners that "clearly proclaim the principles" binding them together. The banners, however, would "contain nothing political or inflammatory." Approximately 600 members marched with the group, including 150 priests and nuns. Several incidents were reported, but the violence did not reach the previous year's level. The most notable incident was a police officer having "to separate one of the more aggressive youths from a priest willing to take him on."¹³

Later that same year, members of the CIC petitioned Cardinal Cushing, recommending he initiate a program to address the educational, employment, and housing needs of the city's black population. By the end of 1965 the CIC was becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress on racial and urban issues. The CIC described the overall "interracial climate" in Boston as "cold, dark and potentially stormy." The petitioners pointed out, "There exists at this moment among our Negro brothers a feeling of discouragement and bitterness bordering close on despair. This feeling is particularly strong in the case of those Catholics among them, some of whom find themselves facing a crisis of faith by reason of the fact that the white voters of Boston, overwhelmingly Catholic, seem to have locked the door to the ghetto and thrown away the key." This crisis of faith was "almost unbearable" for the city's black Catholics, said the CIC, particularly because they were being denied justice "from fellow Catholics."¹⁴

The CIC concluded in a report to the cardinal that the "majority of Negroes is now convinced beyond any doubt that the majority of white Catholics, lay and cleric, is against them." They also charged that white Catholics were "determined not to permit Negroes to live in the same neighborhoods, not to permit Negro children to go to school with their children, [and] not to permit Negroes to fill the better jobs that have heretofore been monopolized mainly by whites." The church's standing within the black community "has rarely, if ever . . . been lower in the Negro community," according to members of the CIC. The crisis of faith among the city's black Catholics was matched by a "crisis of conscience facing whites in general, and white Catholics in particular," they also concluded.

After having presented the problem to the cardinal, the CIC urged him to establish an archdiocesan commission on human rights. The CIC wanted Cushing to create programs to better educate white Catholics on the church's racial teachings. They desired a weekly column in the *Pilot* and parish councils to sponsor interracial activity. The CIC also wanted the church to use its purchasing power to advance the agenda of blacks and other minority groups. The CIC asked the archdiocese to encourage housing cooperatives, build new low-income housing, and help rehabilitate existing structures. They asked that parish-level associations be established "to support and organize fair housing committees that would take the initiative in encouraging Negroes to move into white neighborhoods and to make them feel at home there."¹⁵

While it is uncertain whether Cushing responded directly to the CIC, the archdiocese did address several of the issues raised in their petition. The next year, the archdiocese formed the Commission on Human Relations (CHR) in January "to coordinate inner city and racial education programs" in Boston. Monsignor Russell J. Collins, pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Roxbury, chaired the commission. Its executive director was Rev. Paul P. Rynne, an assistant at St. Patrick's in Roxbury. Both parishes were becoming increasingly attended by people of color, slowly replacing the many Irish Catholics who worshiped there only a few short years ago. In July 1967 the CHR offered 112 scholarships to black students in the Catholic Metco program.¹⁶

The archdiocese also announced that Cardinal Cushing supported President Johnson's civil rights message of March 16, 1965, ironically the day before the St. Patrick's Day incident in South Boston.¹⁷ That same month, four Catholic priests from the archdiocese joined other religious leaders from Boston and around the nation and thousands of other protestors in Selma, Alabama. None of the priests were from parishes within Boston. They were accompanied by a lay delegation representing the city's CIC.¹⁸

In April 1965 Boston's CIC hailed Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to Boston. Cardinal Cushing, along with Massachusetts's Governor John Volpe, were sponsors of his Boston trip. The council called upon all Catholics to attend a public rally scheduled to be held on April 23 on Boston Common. Cardinal Cushing noted that King's visit to Boston presented Boston's Catholics with an "opportunity for all of us to reflect once more upon the progress of the Civil Rights movement, and especially its accomplishments locally here in Boston."¹⁹

In May 1966 the CHR sponsored a televised human rights dialogue moderated by Rev. Harold A. Furblur, the archdiocese's only African American priest and an assistant at St. John's parish in Roxbury. Throughout the 1960s Father Furblur, who was ordained in 1961, kept a low profile as a priest, not wanting to get too deeply involved in racial or inner-city problems in Boston. Father Martin Carter, S.A., who was in Boston during the late 1960s (but was only a brother then) and knew Fr. Furblur, tried to bring him into the black Catholic movement but had little success.²⁰

In 1967 a group of twenty inner-city white priests founded the Association of Boston Urban Priests (ABUP) in the wake of rioting by blacks that June. This progressive organization was dedicated to making the church more relevant to African Americans and addressing the problems of inner-city poverty and decay. Over the next few years the association was a thorn in Cushing's side. In addition to advocating that more archdiocesan funds be dedicated to inner-city parishes, ABUP supported the radical Berrigan brothers and even issued their own pastoral letter, which was highly critical of the church in Boston. Eventually ABUP supported the idea of "white reparations" to black Bostonians.²¹

A year later, members of the Sisters Committee of Boston's CIC founded the Association of Urban Sisters (AUS) with similar objectives. Under pressure from the CIC, ABUP, and AUS, the archdiocese established numerous programs to combat racism and urban decline, particularly in Roxbury, the South End, and parts of Dorchester throughout the latter half of the 1960s. These organizations, committed clergy, and the work of many young dedicated priests graduating from St. John's Seminary throughout the 1960s prodded the church into confronting many of the social and economic problems found throughout the city.²² Throughout the 1960s the Sisters Committee of the CIC backed programs fostering better race relations.²³

In an effort to organize the city's African American Catholic community and to get them much more involved, Fr. Martin Carter organized a group called Black Catholics in Action (BCIA) in 1967. The BCIA is a good example of a grassroots organization formed in the 1960s. It took positions on everything from Cesar Chavez's farm workers' protests to the draft and the Vietnam War.²⁴ The BCIA pledged itself "to work unceasingly for the liberation of black people."

To this end, they proposed a program guided by five basic principles.

First, they wanted the BCIA to "assist the bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities in facing the racial crisis, described by the bishops as 'unprecedented in the history of the nation or of the Church.'" Second, they asked that black priests, religious, and members of the laity be brought "more effectively into operation." Third, they called upon the archdiocese "to witness the catholicity of the Church by recognizing and utilizing the potential for leadership in the black community, in all areas of the diocese." Fourth, the BCIA asked that black Catholics be given "genuine" leadership positions within the black Catholic community. Finally, they called for "new types of ministries originating in the black communities."

They concluded that "unless black leadership and control are in evidence within the Catholic Church as it operates in black communities, the operation of the Church there will be steadily reduced until it reaches the vanishing point." "The proposals advanced" in the paper were "intended to reverse this trend so that the resources of the black community will be directed to the benefit of entire society and, more especially, to the survival and even the growth of Church among black people." In the end, "with a confidence born of our faith in Christ," the BCIA invited "all who will to join us in our determination" to support a number of initiatives ranging from spiritual renewal to economic issues and education.

Father Carter, who was from North Carolina and ordained a priest in 1975, remembers that organizing the city's black Catholics proved somewhat difficult, given what he called the "very conservative" nature of black Bostonians themselves, and was one of the reasons he had such difficulty getting Fr. Furblur, the first African American ordained a priest for the archdiocese, involved. The BCIA established contact with other black organizations and worked with the ABUP, CIC, and AUS.²⁵

Despite these efforts, the racial climate and Boston's inner city continued to deteriorate throughout 1968, particularly after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. That event prompted the CIC, the ABUP, and the AUS to become increasingly more radical in some of their positions and the demands they made upon the archdiocese. A few days after Dr. King's assassination, the CIC sponsored a "72 hour penitential prayer and fasting vigil" in front of Cushing's residence "in reparation for the share of all white people in this diocese in the death of Martin Luther King and in reparation for the great gap between rhetoric and actions of the archdiocese."²⁶ A month later, Lena DiCicco, president of the CIC,

wrote the chancellor of the archdiocese on behalf of the CIC, asking that the archdiocese's actions match its rhetoric. She asked him for a conference to "discuss a matter of mutual concern—the financial commitment of our Boston Archdiocese to the inner city." The CIC proposed that "substantial resources be committed to equal opportunity and justice for black people" in Boston. The archdiocese had already agreed to fund Project Equality in the amount of \$100,000, for which the CIC was grateful. At the same time the CIC requested 4 percent of the Jubilee Fund, approximately \$2 million, "be made to the inner city." DiCicco also asked that "all monies derived from the sale of inner city church properties due to urban renewal and highway construction remain in the inner city"; for the "establishment of model [schools] and the expansion of Catholic METCO"; and "that parish community centers and schools be established to replace churches removed through urban renewal." The CIC also solicited help from the chancellor in eliminating racism among the archdiocese's clergy and laity in greater Boston by a "sustained program of education and the organization of parish groups designed to combat racial prejudice." The CIC hoped the archdiocese would make a financial commitment "to meet the need for low-income housing in the inner city and in surrounding communities, including new and rehabilitated housing in the black community and a \$500,000 investment in the non-profit Metropolitan Development Fund." Finally the CIC asked "that a \$1 million fund be established to finance direct grants to black self-help groups working on community programs."²⁷

After sharpening its rhetoric and listing its demands in November 1968, the CIC was praised for its interracial commitment to the inner city by Boston City Councilor Thomas I. Atkins, the first African American Bostonian to win a seat on the council in a citywide election. He credited the CIC with a number of recent accomplishments: the formation of the archdiocese's Commission on Human Rights; interracial parish councils; the institution and expansion of the Catholic Metco Program, "by which black youngsters from the Boston Public Schools are being bussed to parochial schools of the Archdiocese"; Project Equality; a number of educational programs run by the CIC; and most importantly the formation of the Association of Boston Urban Priests, which Atkins called "perhaps the greatest single development in the Boston area." (Twenty-five of its members had openly endorsed Atkins in the fall elections of 1967, which certainly did not hurt his campaign.) Atkins also credited the CIC with "awakening consciences to moral,

religious, and administrative obligations that led many priests to make greater commitments than ever before." Atkins told DiCicco that he had "seen the growth of respect for the Catholic Church within the black community" because of "the visible and active involvement of these priests in dealing with rats, roaches, housing, employment, war, peace, health, government, and many other areas."

Atkins was still critical of the CIC's failure to realize "that the problems about which we are both concerned cannot be tackled effectively on a piecemeal basis by part-time warriors." Because of its large and growing membership, he noted, the CIC might have to consider "a paid staff whose job it will be to do the preliminary work which will make it possible for volunteer members to contribute effectively." Without adequate funding, it would be impossible "to realize the potential represented by your membership," Atkins told DiCicco. He also hoped that "day never comes" when the community would be without the CIC or the ABUP.²⁸

The prior June the ABUP and the CIC sent seventy marchers to the Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington, D.C., during the Poor People's Campaign, which had been protesting in the city for weeks. The CIC was particularly pleased with the turnout by both black *and* white Catholic Bostonians.²⁹

Following on the heels of the Kerner report and its call for a massive and sustained commitment of the nation to end racial prejudice, the National Black Economic Development Conference issued its "Black Manifesto," calling upon American churches and synagogues to pay \$500 million in "reparation for injustices suffered by blacks during and since the slavery period."³⁰ While admitting that the whole country "and all of its citizens owe massive compensation to the Negro (and to the Indian and others) for things left undone in generations passed," the *Pilot* rejected a fixed-dollar amount and instead called for a renewed commitment to black Americans without offering any specifics.³¹

Others within the archdiocese, however, were more willing to address the reparations issue. In 1969 priests, sisters, and laity formed the White Reparations Caucus of the Catholic Church of Boston. The organization represented the CIC, CHR, ABUP, and AUS. The CHR had been examining the issue for a number of months. Its director, Fr. Rynne, "considered the proposal to set up a fund for local community development via the establishment of a sub-committee on Cooperative Economic Development." This issue proved to be difficult to resolve,

however. Some caucus members wanted more research and study, while others wanted “direct action to educate and mobilize the diocese regarding the Black Manifesto.” In October the caucus decided that the disclosure of archdiocesan assets was necessary. A motion was made by Rev. Walter Waldron that a group from the caucus “go with a lawyer to the Attorney General’s Office to find out the legalities required of non-profit sole corporations’ financial disclosures.” The group also wanted the archdiocese to release a survey of the archdiocesan schools in case the “school property may be an in-kind-contribution which the Catholic Church of Boston” would be asked to make regarding the demands found in the “Black Manifesto.”³²

No action was taken until May 1970, when the Boston Priests’ Senate of the archdiocese took up the reparations issue.³³ In June the chairman of the White Reparations Committee of the Priests’ Senate, and pastor of St. Mary of the Angels in Roxbury, Rev. William H. Mullin, wrote the members of the Urban Sisters, asking for their support of “the concept of white reparation—in word and deed—to black people, on the part of the Catholic church of Boston.” He asked for their help because he was afraid that the cardinal “may just not act on this motion and ‘wait us out’ or may say that since he is to retire soon, he cannot act on the motion.” Mullin said it would be a “tragedy of inestimably [*sic*] proportions” if the church did not act. Mullin twice wrote the *Pilot* asking “that one of the editorials be devoted to the whole issue of white reparation”—both times to no avail. He did write a letter to the editor, which was not printed in its entirety. Mullin thanked the “Priests Senate of the Archdiocese of Boston for their serious concern and sense of moral justice in passing recently a 3-part motion regarding the responsibility of the Catholic Church of Boston” toward African Americans. Mullin also recognized the difficult financial situation in which the Boston church found itself. He warned, however, that “there is no greater priority *today* [emphasis his] than that of beginning to right the past and present injustices of racial suppression and discrimination. Tomorrow may be too late!” Mullin also asked, but the *Pilot* did not print his appeal, “that many people and organizations interested in promoting justice and dignity for all peoples . . . write to Cardinal Cushing, and the *PILOT*, *today* [emphasis his], expressing their support and encouragement for this 3-part motion.”³⁴

At the end of June, Joseph E. Connolly, president of the CIC, wrote to the cardinal urging his support of the Priests’ Senate’s actions. He

told Cushing, "We further feel that Catholics in the Boston Archdiocese have a responsibility for the reparation of the wrong."³⁵ Cushing never responded to Connolly's letter. In August Connolly wrote Msgr. Joseph F. Maguire, an influential member of Cushing's inner circle of advisors and later bishop of Springfield, Massachusetts, asking for his help. They still had not heard from Cushing and were "growing more concerned about the situation." Connolly noted that the CIC was not the only group troubled with the situation. "The black community can't help but wonder if this is another case of the Church talking about action but doing very little," Connolly explained to Msgr. Maguire. Also, "more and more concerned white Catholics are feeling frustrated about the unexplained delay in implementing the recommended program."³⁶

The CIC was growing increasingly frustrated with the hostile attitudes of some white Catholics throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. In May 1970 the CIC criticized Judge Elijah Adlow's inquiry into the fatal shooting of two blacks by a white police officer as a "whitewash," which only serves "to reinforce distrust and suspicion of the present judicial process." In a letter to the editor of the *Pilot*, Connolly stated the CIC Board of Directors believed "the handling of this case leads only to further polarization between the black and white communities . . . which is predominately Catholic and calls for the citizens of this community to make known their dissatisfaction with the findings of this inquest."

The CIC was also experiencing difficulties attracting support within the black community. Dr. Patricia Goler, an African American Catholic professor at Regis College and chairperson of the CHR, told a gathering of CIC members that they "must continue even in the face of rejection by your black brothers." She noted in October 1970 that "the basic task of sensitizing the Catholic Church to live the reality of the Christian spirit and brotherhood in relation to Black people is essentially the same." She suggested that what had changed within the interracial movement was the notion that to "unmask racism" required the cooperation of both races. She told the group that they would "be called upon to violate the mores of a self-contented, racist society and Church" and that they "must be prepared to pay the price."³⁷

As race relations deteriorated at the end of the 1960s, so did Cardinal Cushing's health. At a time when Boston could have used a strong voice of reassurance, many of the city's white, working-class Catholics found themselves wondering if the church cared about them at all. Cushing was set to retire in August 1970. Speculation mounted as to who his

successor would be. Many priests and lay Catholics assumed Rome would appoint a bishop of Irish descent, possibly even one of the city's auxiliary bishops. Many were surprised when Humberto Sousa Medeiros, the bishop of Brownsville, Texas, a Portuguese American born in the Azores and who grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts, was named to replace Cushing in May 1970. Medeiros was seen as an outsider to the majority of Boston's Catholics. Their initial reaction ranged from astonishment to enthusiasm. Many of the city's Irish priests and laity saw Medeiros's appointment "as a threat to their historical prerogatives," according to J. Anthony Lukas. Derogatory remarks ranging from "that little Portogee" to the "spic Archbishop" were heard throughout Boston. As the October day approached when Medeiros was to be officially installed, the chancery received a number of death threats against Medeiros. A cross was also burned on the chancery lawn, and a pipe bomb was discovered in its doorway.³⁸ Many of Boston's Catholics were enthusiastic at Medeiros's arrival, however—particularly the city's growing population of Hispanics, Puerto Ricans, Haitians, and African Americans. Many of them saw in Medeiros a gentle, caring man, dedicated to the poor and racial equality.³⁹

Shortly after his arrival and installation Medeiros had to begin dealing with problems ranging from retiring the archdiocese's debt, declining Mass attendance, the poor economy, and—most troubling of all—the city's deteriorating race relations, "white flight," and Boston's racially imbalanced public school system.⁴⁰ Medeiros was a cautious man. He trod lightly on race matters and problems of urban poverty to the disappointment of the more progressive elements within the church. A year after his arrival, all sixteen members of the CHR threatened to resign if Medeiros did not become more outspoken on race and poverty. In October 1971 Archbishop Medeiros established the "Office for Urban Apostolates" in an "effort to coordinate church work in the area's cities as it relates to racism, violence, housing, the elderly, and the like."⁴¹ He also agreed to issue a pastoral letter on urban problems and race, which he did in August 1972. The letter, "Man's Cities and God's Poor," was written with the help of Fr. Thomas McDonnell and received international attention. He criticized the poverty found throughout many of Boston's poorer and darker neighborhoods and linked it to racism, which he called a "pernicious form of injustice."⁴²

The efforts of Medeiros and of the ABUP, BCIA, and AUS appear to have been going nowhere. In the midst of the legal battle to desegregate

Boston's public schools, the CIC of Boston decided to disband, effective April 30, 1973, leaving the archdiocese without an independent biracial Catholic organization committed to interracial tolerance and activity. The board of directors for the council noted in a letter to CIC members the decision would "come as a surprise to some and . . . will disappoint many." The president of the organization, Rev. Thomas D. Corrigan, believed the decision was "based on an honest assessment, not only of the present status of C.I.C., but of the tenor of our times." He gave a number of reasons for the decision to disband: "First that the organization, while generously supported by your dues and contributions, is no longer capable of making significant progress towards its goal of promoting interracial justice and communication within the Catholic community." "Each year," he added, "we have more and more trouble recruiting board members and volunteers." The second reason Fr. Corrigan gave is most significant in understanding race relations in Boston between white Catholics and African Americans. Corrigan was convinced "that the goals of C.I.C. can be more effectively achieved if our members continue to support and work with community organizations whose membership is broader, more ecumenically oriented, and, in fact truly interracial."

Corrigan noted several recent events that pointed to the promise of what the organization could have been and the reality of the situation in the spring of 1973. On March 15, David S. Nelson was sworn in as a justice of the Superior Court in Massachusetts. His appointment to the state bench marked the first time an African American Catholic had been so honored. (In 1979 he was nominated by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the United States federal court in Boston, the first African American named to the post.) Corrigan felt that Nelson's appointment and the ceremony swearing him in, attended by nearly 1,000 people, "fulfilled for a moment all that C.I.C. has worked for over the years."

In sharp contrast to Nelson's rise, Corrigan noted several ugly racial episodes that took place during March and April that same year. Anti-busing and anti-black sentiment were evident on D Street in South Boston during the St. Patrick's Day parade in March, "which provide even clearer evidence of the monumental task still confronting Church and Society." Also, the day Corrigan composed the letter, thousands of Bostonians, "mostly women and small children, paraded through the streets" in an anti-busing demonstration, some chanting slogans such as "our

kids aren't going anywhere." "Granted the complexity of the issue," Corrigan noted, "the racist roots of the opposition to integrating the schools are clear."⁴³

By 1974 the AUS and the ABUP had gone from vibrant effective organizations, in the words of J. Anthony Lukas, "into oblivion." Like the CIC, the AUS and ABUP were also exhausted from their work and felt their resources and energy could be better spent on the parish level. In 1971 the archdiocese ceased providing financial support for AUS member participation in the Task Force in Urban Educational Planning. The AUS was having serious financial difficulties since the early 1970s, as funds from the archdiocese dried up due to its own fiscal problems. Membership was down to only twenty-three by the end of 1973.⁴⁴

The state board of education's plan to racially balance Boston's schools was set to go into effect with the start of the new school year in September 1974. In March of that year, 150 priests from the city's parishes attended a workshop on the law, sponsored by the archdiocese. Rev. Thomas J. McDonnell, a professor at St. John's Seminary (and Medeiros's collaborator on "Man's Cities and God's Poor") "warned the priests that the church's position in support of the racial imbalance law has received and will continue to receive, strong opposition from Catholics." He noted that "in an age when the challenge to authority is so endemic, it is not surprising that the church's authority to speak on social issues should be challenged." McDonnell concluded that "an unjust, unequal situation exists in our schools; busing is one of the politically just means to remedy the situation; and in the concrete, the only means available to us now; it has been legitimately chosen by proper governmental authority; and given guidelines from the Pastoral constitution, it would flow from the mind of the Church that we should support this law."⁴⁵

That same month, Fr. Rynne once again urged the city's Catholics, including members of the school committee and in the legislature, to oppose any changes to the existing law. He argued that the Racial Imbalance Act (which outlawed imbalanced schools) was originally adopted in 1965 because "above all else . . . it was right morally." Father Rynne asked Catholics to join Cardinal Medeiros and other religious leaders at Gardner Auditorium on April 4, 1974, to oppose any changes to the law. He also asked Catholics to write their elected representatives. Cardinal Medeiros appeared personally at the State House, testified before the Education Committee of the Massachusetts legislature, and opposed

over thirty-five bills designed to weaken the law. Cardinal Medeiros—he was elevated to that rank in February 1973—told the Joint Committee on Education that he and his predecessor, Cardinal Cushing, supported the 1965 law because “it is right—because it calls upon our citizens to collaborate for the common good of all.” He argued that the racial imbalance found in the city’s schools “is in contradiction to the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.” Medeiros called upon all people, even those outside Boston who were unaffected by the law, “to see the problem for what it is—something which is not only the problem of our large cities but which is the problem of our whole society. Racism is a moral sickness which is seriously weakening our society.”⁴⁶

On the eve of the court-ordered desegregation of Boston’s public schools in 1974 and the rise in tensions between the city’s African Americans and Irish Catholics, Boston found itself without any effective grassroots organizations working to improve race relations between Catholics and non-Catholics and between black and white Catholics. The efforts made by the CIC, BCIA, ABUP, and AUS on the surface might seem to have been in vain, given the level of violence and the urban turmoil that continued to plague Boston during the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, events could have been even worse if not for the actions of these dedicated groups and their members. Of course, we cannot really know.

In the end the failure of these groups to markedly improve Boston’s racial climate rests not so much on their goals but in their methods and limitations. It seems that more effort was made at changing the institutional church and not enough effort at changing the racial attitudes of Boston’s Catholics. In effect, they focused on the long-term restructuring of the church and not on improving the short-term racial attitudes of Catholic Bostonians. By the late 1960s, members of the clergy, not lay people, were some of the CIC’s most active members. By definition, the ABUP and AUS were limited to religious and attracted those priests, nuns, and brothers already dedicated to racial justice. Also, to be truly effective, organizations like the CIC, BCIA, and ABUP had to attract both black and white Catholics. CICs were generally founded and maintained in areas where African Americans were more numerous, not in predominately white parishes. The archdiocese had ordained only one African American priest before the mid-1970s. Lastly, the efforts of these groups were scattered in various directions, which in the end did little to improve the racial attitudes of Boston’s Catholics. Racism and

poverty often go hand in hand. It would seem natural that the CIC and ABUP would advocate for a greater financial commitment from the archdiocese to the inner city. However, efforts to secure reparations from the church for its historical wrongs did little to affect the attitude of white Catholics and black Bostonians. It had little chance of ever succeeding, given that they were largely talking to themselves.

Notes

1. See J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Knopf, 1985); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), for three detailed examinations of the busing crisis and the racial violence associated with it.

2. See William C. Leonard, "A Parish for the Black Catholics of Boston," *Catholic Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (January 1997): 44-68.

3. *Chronicle*, March 10 and December 15, 1951.

4. *Chronicle*, December 14, 1957.

5. David W. Southern, *John Lafarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911-1963* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), xiii, 277-79.

6. *Pilot*, February 16, 1963.

7. *Pilot*, January 26, 1963.

8. March 10, 1964, n.t., Catholic Interracial Council, box 18, folder 11, RG VII.019, Francis J. Lally Papers, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston (hereafter AABo); "Constitution and By-Laws of the Catholic Interracial Council," April 14, 1964, Catholic Interracial Council, box 18, folder 11, Lally Papers; *Pilot*, June 29, 1963.

9. *Pilot*, August 3, 1963; August 31, 1963.

10. Archdiocesan News Bureau (hereafter ANB), RG V.024, August 22, 1963, AABo.

11. *Pilot*, January 7, 1967; Robert C. Hayden, *African-Americans in Boston: More than 350 Years* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1991), 27-28.

12. ANB, May 12, 1963, and May 17, 1964. For a detailed examination of Lally's influence on Cushing, see Lukas, *Common Ground*, 372-404.

13. Hallgring to Catholic Interracial Council Members, February 26, 1965, box 2, folder 3, RG VI. 001, Catholic Interracial Council Papers, M-2702 (hereafter CICP), Association of Urban Sisters (hereafter AUS), AABo; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 386; and John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic*

Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 177.

14. "Petition to the Most Rev. Richard Cardinal Cushing," December 19, 1965, CICIP.

15. *Ibid.*; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 134.

16. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 177; *Pilot*, January 22, 1966; Collins to Cushing, April 27, 1966, Archdiocesan Commission on Human Relations File, RG III.G.01, AABO; Collins to Provincial, July 10, 1967, file, "Catholic Metco Summer, 1967," AUS, AABO; ANB, May 26, 1966.

17. *Pilot*, February 27, 1965.

18. ANB, March 16, 1965. The priests were Thomas J. Carroll, director of the Catholic Guild for the Blind; Fr. Francis J. McDonnell, pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Lynn; Fr. Walter M. McDonough, St. Charles parish in Woburn; and Fr. Robert W. Baer, C.S.P., a chaplain at Tufts University.

19. *Pilot*, April 17, 1965; April 24, 1965.

20. *Pilot*, May 28, 1966; Rev. Martin J. Carter, S.A., telephone interview with the author, April 28, 1999.

21. Thomas H. O'Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 276; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 388; Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 262-64; Rev. Walter J. Waldron, interview with the author, April 13, 1999.

22. "Articles of Incorporation," AUS, AABO; see also Timothy J. Meagher's article about the AUS in the *Pilot*, February 5, 1987; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 384.

23. *Pilot*, May 13, 1967; June 24, 1968, n.t., "Misc. Papers and Correspondence," AUS, AABO.

24. Rev. Martin J. Carter, interview with the author.

25. Rev. Martin J. Carter, interview with the author; *Pilot*, May 2, 1970.

26. DiCicco to Cushing, April 10, 1968, CICIP, quoted in John Henry Cutler, *Cardinal Cushing of Boston* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1970), 341.

27. DiCicco to Sexton, May 13, 1968, CICIP.

28. Atkins to DiCicco, November 6, 1968, CICIP; Hayden, *African-Americans in Boston*, 98; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 388.

29. *Pilot*, June 22, 1968.

30. *Pilot*, May 17, 1969; May 31, 1969.

31. *Pilot*, June 7, 1969.

32. "10/1/69 Minutes of the White Reparations Caucus of the Catholic Church of Boston," CICIP.

33. *Pilot*, June 6, 1970.

34. Mullin to Association of Urban Sisters Members, June 12, 1970, "Priests Senate," AUS, AABO; *Pilot*, June 13, 1970.

35. Connolly to Cushing, June 30, 1970, CICIP.

36. Connolly to Maguire, August 14, 1970, CICP.
37. *Pilot*, May 9, 1970.
38. O'Connor, *Boston Catholics*, 279–87; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 373–75.
39. Rev. Walter J. Waldron, interview with the author; Rev. Martin J. Carter, interview with the author; Rev. Russell Best, interview with the author, April 22, 1999; Jesse Logan, interview with the author, April 16, 1999; and Cynthia Harris, interview with the author, April 15, 1999. See also Lukas, *Common Ground*, 374.
40. O'Connor, *Boston Catholics*, 288–90; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 390.
41. Lukas, *Common Ground*, 398; *Pilot*, October 16, 1971.
42. Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, "Whatever God Wants": *Pastorals and Addresses by His Eminence Humberto Cardinal Medeiros* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1984), 518–85; O'Connor, *Boston Catholics*, 299.
43. Corrigan to Catholic Interracial Council Members, n.d., CICP; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 59.
44. Lukas, *Common Ground*, 398; n.d., n.t., "Correspondence, 1973–1974," AUS, AABO; "President's Report, 1971–1972," AUS, AABO.
45. *Pilot*, March 29, 1974.
46. Rynne to Members of the Commission for Human Rights, March 27, 1974, CICP; *Pilot*, April 12, 1974. Medeiros's efforts seem to have been in vain, however. By April 1974 the RIA looked as if it would finally be repealed. See Minutes of the Boston School Committee, 1974, no. 16, box 63, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Mass.; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 63–64; Minutes of the Boston School Committee, 1974, no. 20.1, box 63; Minutes of the Boston School Committee, 1974, no. 21, box 63; Minutes of the Boston School Committee, 1974, no. 24.1, box 63.

*The Catholic Church and the Desegregation of
Boston's Public Schools*



JAMES E. GLINSKI

AS A RESULT of Judge W. Arthur Garrity's desegregation ruling in June 1974, Boston was a city marked by a struggle between citizens who supported the desegregation of Boston's public schools and those who did not. The struggle involved all of the city's institutions and their leaders, including the Archdiocese of Boston.

In a city that was 70 percent Catholic, it was expected that the church would play an influential role in the effort to implement the court's order. However, the church was facing many problems of its own at the time, including an enrollment crisis in its own schools, a multimillion-dollar debt, and an adjustment to a new archbishop, Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, who had been appointed in 1970 to succeed Richard Cardinal Cushing. These problems combined to make it difficult for the church to fulfill expectations that it play a major role in Boston's attempt to desegregate its schools.

To understand truly the activities of the church during this period, one must put them in the context of a long struggle by church reformers to convince the church to develop an effective policy for dealing with a changing inner city and the paradigm of policy making that the church had established to deal with major issues. Although the policies and practices of the Archdiocese of Boston on social and moral issues would in large part be determined by its archbishop, they were also the result of a complicated and intricate process involving a large cast of characters, both lay and religious.

Cardinal Medeiros, like his predecessor Cardinal Cushing, would be pressured by reform-minded individuals and groups, such as the Catholic Interracial Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Association of Boston Urban Priests, and the Association of Urban Sisters, to

make the church more responsive to the changing environment of Boston. These reformers attempted to convince the archbishop to develop a cohesive urban policy, to be administered by an effective church agency, which could unify the efforts of the various reformers within the church. Many reformers also emphasized the role that parochial schools could play as a bridge between Boston's white and minority communities. Not surprisingly, however, these reformers encountered considerable resistance, both bureaucratic and philosophical, from the church.

The Cardinal

A complex person, Cardinal Medeiros exhibited a leadership style and personal characteristics that would be very influential in determining the effectiveness of the church during the desegregation crisis. Many of those who supported the selection of Medeiros as archbishop hoped that he would bring to Boston the same commitment to the underprivileged that he had demonstrated in his efforts for farm workers during his tenure as the bishop of Brownsville, Texas. In Boston, a commitment to the underprivileged meant using the prestige and power of the church to help resolve the city's intensifying racial crisis.

Perhaps because they set their expectations too high or had envisioned the new archbishop to be someone he was not, his progressive supporters were concerned over Medeiros's inactivity on moral and social issues during his first year as archbishop. In contrast to Cardinal Cushing, who made his own decisions and took action, Medeiros listened to his advisors' recommendations and made carefully reasoned decisions that were often compromises between conflicting advice. In addition, Medeiros, unlike Cushing, felt that the church should not be involved in political activity. It soon became clear that Medeiros would often need to be pressured to act, sometimes with impressive results.

Under Medeiros the church continued to support the state's Racial Imbalance Act (RIA) against attempts to repeal or weaken it. Passed in 1965, this law stated that any school in Massachusetts with more than a 50 percent nonwhite enrollment was imbalanced. If a school system did not redress the imbalance the state Department of Education had the power to approve corrective measures or to impose punitive action, such as the withdrawal of state funding, until the school system complied with the law. However, two court actions would force the church and its

archbishop to increase their commitment to racially balanced schools. In 1972 Federal District Judge W. Arthur Garrity began hearing preliminary motions on *Morgan v. Hennigan*,¹ the attempt by black parents to desegregate Boston's public schools. In 1973 the state Supreme Judicial Court ordered the Department of Education to prepare a plan for the implementation of the RIA in Boston, effective September 1974.

In his public statements and writings, such as his impressive pastoral letter "Man's Cities and God's Poor," Medeiros repeated his support for the RIA and also endorsed busing as one way to break the "habit" of segregation. In response to opposition to the planned busing of public school students in the fall of 1973, he asked "every Catholic to examine his conscience as to the extent of his contribution to the present tension and frustration" and repeated his position that integrated education was a moral issue and "that hatred of a brother or sister and disdain for legitimate authority and law are immoral!"² Further, responding to pleas for an increase in his personal involvement in support of the RIA and reacting to the massive repeal efforts by its opponents, on April 4, 1974, Cardinal Medeiros personally appeared before the Joint Committee on Education to voice his support for the RIA.

Announcing his support for Garrity's decision, Cardinal Medeiros saved the RIA. The archbishop of Boston was still the most influential religious leader in Massachusetts and there was some doubt whether other leaders, such as Episcopal Bishop John Burgess, would have testified or would have been as effective if Cardinal Medeiros had not. In addition, in an act rare for Cardinal Medeiros, he telephoned several influential legislators to emphasize his support for the RIA.³ Action in the federal courtroom would also give the cardinal an opportunity to demonstrate his support for integration, because on June 21, 1974, Judge Garrity ordered the Boston School Committee to comply with the RIA.

Announcing his support for Garrity's decision, Cardinal Medeiros noted that the School Committee had had nine years to comply with the law but had done nothing. He also told reporters that although "busing may not be the most desirable way to integrate," it is "all we have right now" and is "only the beginning of the fight."⁴ However, the biggest test of the cardinal's support for integration would be the determination of a policy for the archdiocese's troubled school system, which if allowed to become a haven for refugees from busing, as many Catholics wanted it to be, could have increased its enrollment at the expense of desegregation.

The Problems Facing Catholic Education in the 1970s

In 1972 Catholic schools in the United States were closing at a rate of more than one per day as enrollments dropped 18 percent over the previous three years, with a drop of 42 percent projected by 1980.⁵ The Archdiocese of Boston was no exception to these trends. Its 345 schools with 153,344 students in 1964 had shrunk by 1974 to 248 schools with 81,540 students (see table 13.1).⁶ Even the usually optimistic Cardinal Cushing had commented in 1970 that parochial schools would be extinct by 1980.⁷ It was little wonder that Cardinal Medeiros would give the archdiocese's board of education a lot of his time.

Aside from a decrease in enrollment, a variety of other problems faced the archdiocesan schools. There was a growing lack of confidence in Catholic education resulting from the publicity given to some of the crash closings, which created fear among parents, teachers, and pastors that their school would be next. Rising maintenance and payroll expenses were beginning to cause a financial crisis for many schools. The educational budget of the archdiocese showed a \$2 million deficit for the school year 1972-73. A lack of planning in some parishes hid danger signals that, if discovered earlier, might have made it possible to take steps to keep some schools open. The diminishing number of vocations to the religious communities created multiple problems. First, many pastors thought of their schools as "sister schools" and felt that a school was not Catholic unless it was staffed by religious women. Second, many schools could not afford to remain open if they had to pay lay teachers, who necessarily received higher salaries than religious.⁸

The importance of religious communities to the schools was dramatically demonstrated in December 1972, when the two largest orders of teaching nuns in the archdiocese, the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, announced that they would withdraw from dozens of schools in the archdiocese by 1975. Although these communities made their decision to stabilize the schools of the archdiocese, especially those of the inner-city parishes, their action led to the closing of eighteen schools in June 1973 and left many parents feeling bitter.⁹

Cardinal Medeiros and the archdiocesan board of education were not unaware of the plans of the sisters and had been formulating a policy of their own, which in part supported the decision made by the two religious communities. In a series of ten regional meetings between October 11 and November 7, 1972, the board had presented its program to the

TABLE 13.1. HISTORY OF ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOL SYSTEM OF
ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON, 1954-1980

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Schools</i>			<i>Enrollment</i>		
	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Total</i>
1954-55	224	93	317	107,027	24,120	131,147
1955-56	227	92	319	108,957	25,090	134,047
1956-57	231	93	324	109,898	26,295	136,193
1957-58	235	94	329	111,588	27,914	139,502
1958-59	242	96	338	114,798	29,170	143,968
1959-60	243	98	341	117,768	30,205	147,973
1960-61	245	98	343	118,847	31,496	150,343
1961-62	243	99	342	118,637	32,708	151,345
1962-63	243	99	342	118,540	33,489	152,029
1963-64	245	101	346	118,876	34,297	153,173
1964-65	246	99	345	119,635	33,709	153,344
1965-66	251	99	350	118,140	33,422	151,562
1966-67	246	96	342	115,141	33,514	148,655
1967-68	245	93	338	110,216	33,521	143,737
1968-69	242	91	333	103,259	32,532	135,791
1969-70	235	86	321	93,176	31,420	124,596
1970-71	221	76	297	81,705	28,124	109,829
1971-72	210	67	277	73,999	26,596	100,595
1972-73	202	65	267	66,702	26,535	93,237
1973-74	185	60	245	58,935	25,834	84,769
1974-75*	187	61	248	55,617	25,923	81,540
1975-76	177	59	236	54,492	25,636	80,128
1976-77	177	59	236	52,263	25,246	77,509
1977-78	171	59	230	50,003	24,981	74,984
1978-79	167	58	225	47,585	24,431	72,016
1979-80	165	56	221	46,936	24,556	71,492

*First year of desegregation and mandatory busing.

leaders of the parishes and religious communities. Included in this program were the establishment of individual boards for the parish schools and guidelines for school closings. It was also clear that other solutions and strategies were being promoted by the board, including the consolidation of schools and faculties in areas where too many schools competed with one another for students; intercommunity staffing, whereby religious from various orders would teach in the same school; the identification of certain schools as higher priorities for remaining open; and the acceptance of increased involvement of lay teachers and parental involvement in planning.¹⁰

One noteworthy decision made by the archdiocese was to make a priority of keeping as many inner-city schools open as possible. Despite its financial problems, the archdiocese heavily subsidized the schools of

parishes in the predominantly black neighborhood of Roxbury. For example, in 1973 the archdiocese contributed \$58,644, or more than 50 percent, to the \$116,169 budget of the St. Francis de Sales school in Roxbury.¹¹ In addition, the archdiocese was fortunate to have several priests and nuns who dedicated themselves to aiding minorities in the inner city, sometimes spending thousands of dollars of their own personal funds to keep schools going. Many of these church activists were, however, pressing the cardinal to take a more active role in supporting minority issues, especially the racial balancing of Boston's public schools.

The Church's Policy

Judge Garrity's June 1974 order to implement the first phase of the court's desegregation plan at the beginning of the 1974-75 school year created an enormous dilemma for an archdiocese struggling to keep its schools open while attempting to remain true to its teachings on social justice and to its cardinal's support for integration. Consistent with his consensus style of leadership and in anticipation of the court order, Cardinal Medeiros made a decision earlier in 1974 to shut the doors of parochial schools to refugees from the busing plan only after extensive consultation with his advisors.

One of the most important factors he had to consider was the strong opposition to busing by large numbers of Catholic parents. Although there were no exact figures, it was the opinion of church leaders that the overwhelming majority of those opposed to busing were Catholics.¹² How the church's probusing stance would affect the receipts of the annual archdiocesan-wide stewardship appeal, the most important source of revenue to pay off the church's \$25 million debt, was another practical consideration. The obvious fact that the Catholic schools were predominantly de facto segregated also caused the cardinal some difficulty in formulating his decision on busing policy. If the church supported busing, then why did it not do more to integrate its own schools? If, on the other hand, it remained silent on busing, it opened itself to a charge of ducking a moral issue. In addition, the decision not to allow open enrollment in parochial schools at a time when declining enrollments were forcing the closing of many Catholic schools was questioned by a number of parents and school administrators.

Although the cardinal received input from several church officials, the

major influence on his decision to support the desegregation order by not allowing open enrollment came from Patricia Goler, head of the archdiocese's Commission on Human Rights. Goler had a long history of involvement in the church's work in the inner city and was highly respected by church officials as deeply and unselfishly committed to minority rights. She and state Superior Court Judge David Nelson served as the liaison between the NAACP and other inner-city organizations, such as Freedom House, and the cardinal. Goler pressured Cardinal Medeiros to testify at the State House in April 1974.¹³ It was clear that the cardinal's decision to support racially balanced schools was also the result of his personal convictions and his commitment to following the law even though he might have had doubts about the specifics.

Once the decision was made to support the desegregation order, it was necessary for the archdiocesan board of education to formulate a policy that would meet the cardinal's approval. The board needed to come up with a policy that would help the city of Boston implement the court order but at the same time preserve Catholic schools.

Competition from parochial schools had long been a central problem for Boston's public schools. Many parents were unwilling to sacrifice their children to the present Boston schools as long as parochial schools provided a better alternative, and some believed that "the closing of the parochial schools would probably be the best thing that ever happened to the Boston public schools. Then the parents, who can now afford to send their children to private and parochial schools, might take a greater interest in the city system."¹⁴ Another drastic solution, aside from closing the parochial schools, would have been to include parochial schools in the busing order. Meetings did in fact take place between representatives of the Boston public schools and the archdiocesan school office to discuss the possibility of increasing minority enrollment in the Catholic schools. However, the suggestion of Catholic school representatives that an opinion be requested from the state attorney general on the availability of funds ended the discussion of this option.¹⁵ The archdiocesan board of education was also aware that to allow open enrollment in Catholic schools would increase their enrollment by as much as 300 percent and kill the desegregation order: it was a tempting option that would have temporarily solved the Catholic schools' enrollment crisis and also made the church popular with the antibusing forces.

When Brother Bartholomew Varden, the archdiocesan school superintendent, began receiving calls in December 1973 and January 1974 from

distraught pastors warning that people were "lining up" to enroll their children in the parish school for the upcoming school year, the board of education decided that it had to make a policy decision soon.¹⁶ Taking into consideration the personal beliefs of Cardinal Medeiros, the strong pressure from Goler and other representatives of the city's minority community, and the views expressed by the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the National Conference of Bishops, the board decided at its January 25, 1974, meeting not to allow the schools of the archdiocese to become havens for those trying to escape school desegregation.

On March 1, 1974, the board of education made public its guidelines on school imbalance. After promising its wholehearted cooperation with public officials and its support for a community effort for improved education, the board presented a five-point procedural plan governing the transfer of public school students to Catholic schools. Any applicant for transfer from public schools would not be accepted unless: (1) the acceptance would improve the racial balance in the school to which the child was applying, (2) the application was due to a change in family address, (3) the family already had other children in the school, (4) the number of students accepted conformed to the average number of acceptances of previous years, or (5) the acceptance was consistent with the principles of social justice as enunciated in the official teachings of the church.¹⁷ The problem now facing the church was how to get support for this policy.

Reaction to the Church Policy

When the first court order was issued by Judge Garrity in late June 1974 the church recognized the polarization it created in the community and the danger that students might become pawns in the various plans to remedy the situation. Nonetheless, the archdiocese stressed compliance with the order.¹⁸ Yet within the church, support for compliance with the court order and for busing in general was far from unanimous.

THE CATHOLIC PRESS

A review of the national Catholic press of the period reflects the diversity of positions Catholics held on this issue. Maurice deG. Ford, in several *Commonweal* articles, defended court-ordered busing as constitutional

and symbolically necessary. Other proponents of busing portrayed busing as a last resort, "not a solution itself, but a means by which the city may eventually be brought to recognize a serious problem in public education and work collectively and politically to solve it." The editors of *America* reminded their readers that in 1972 the United States Catholic Conference identified the issue of race relations as a moral one that included "the right of all children to equal educational opportunity" and that "busing, while certainly not a total solution, may in some instances be a helpful and indeed necessary instrument."¹⁹

The antibusing criticism of church policy by conservative Catholic writers was summarized by Philip Zucchi's *Triumph* article in which he stated:

The Cardinal's directive invites criticism on several counts. First, it uniformly casts upon the parents of children who are attempting to avoid forced busing the gloomy suspicion of racial bigotry. Secondly, it fails to lend support to the very real concerns of parents who think that parental jurisdiction over their children's education supersedes that of the government, and that busing their children into high-crime districts is unsafe. Thirdly, it at least implicitly minimizes the importance of obtaining a Catholic education as opposed to a secular one. And lastly, it assures the continued decline of the Catholic school system.²⁰

The Catholic writer and critic Michael Novak also argued that "busing . . . was an immoral policy" that went against the "basic social principles of American life, against family, neighborhood, class, ethnic, and even educational realities" and was "unfair to working people, was supported only by a small minority of black and whites, and was unconstitutional."²¹ This divergence of opinion in the Catholic press was also shared by many of its readers, including the clergy of the Archdiocese of Boston.

THE CLERGY

The clergy of the archdiocese at the time of court-ordered busing was roughly divided into three groups. One faction was a small but highly visible group of activist priests who pushed for a strong position by the church on minority issues and who felt strongly that the church could do more than it was doing to support desegregation. Many of these priests had worked and lived in the inner city and actively participated

in projects to improve the plight of the city's poor, such as Tent City and the Pine Street Inn. A second group, the majority of the clergy, were sympathetic to the conditions of the poor and supportive of efforts to improve their lives but felt, as did Cardinal Medeiros, that it was primarily the responsibility of public institutions and officials to resolve these problems when they fell outside the sphere of moral issues. Finally, there was a group of conservative clergy who did not understand what the big rush for minority rights was all about and who opposed the church's stance on desegregation. They felt that since other groups had bided their time and eventually received equal opportunity, Boston's blacks and other minorities should do the same.²² Further complicating matters for the church was that sometimes a single parish had priests representing all three positions. As troublesome as this division among the clergy might have been, it was mild compared with the diverse reactions of the laity.

THE LAITY

Although the division of opinion among the laity resembled closely that among the clergy, the majority of the opponents to the court order appeared to be Catholic. Certainly the majority of the antibusing leadership—Louise Day Hicks, Raymond Flynn, Pixie Paladino, and William Bulger—were Catholic. Many Catholics felt that the church's support for the court order was further evidence that it had abandoned them. "I've been fighting with the priests in my parish because they don't represent the community," said one opponent of desegregation. "They haven't done nothing against the issue, but by the same token they haven't defended the people in their community."²³

Antibusing Catholics were particularly upset with the stringent anti-segregation guidelines for the parochial schools. In addition to being subjected to public protests, such as those outside his residence, Cardinal Medeiros also received numerous letters from angry laypeople who reminded him that many Catholic schools "were built by Catholic immigrants for the express purpose of providing an alternative to public school education" and that "these schools are there today not for [the] priests or bishops but for Catholic children."²⁴

Much of the opposition to the church's school policy focused on the rights of parents over their children. ROAR (Restore Our Alien Rights) and other antibusing groups were especially fond of quoting the following statement from Vatican II:

Parents, who have the first and the inalienable duty and right to educate their children, should enjoy true freedom in their choice of schools. Consequently, public authority, which has the obligation to oversee and defend the liberties of citizens, ought to see to it, out of a concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are allocated in such a way that, when selecting schools for their children, parents are genuinely free to follow their consciences.²⁵

Many Catholics also found it hard to support church leaders who told them to oppose abortion laws despite their legality, but to support busing because it was the law of the land.

The opposition to the church's desegregation policies by working-class whites in neighborhoods such as South Boston, Hyde Park, and Charlestown created a dilemma for Cardinal Medeiros that contributed to his inability to reach an understanding with them. The cardinal felt deeply the problems and pain of the poor. He understood that many of the people of South Boston and similar neighborhoods were the "employed poor," people who worked hard but remained relatively poor. He understood that they could not afford to move to a suburb or to send their children to private schools. He also believed that these people got a "raw deal" and were the victims of decisions in which they had no say. This was especially true when it became clear that the court order would not involve communities in the surrounding area in Boston's busing plan.²⁶ However, the cardinal held two other beliefs that would prevent him from giving the opponents of desegregation his support.

The first was his strongly held belief in obeying the law. In many letters he wrote to people who criticized his position on the court order, the cardinal stated: "I am fully aware of the opposition of a great many people to the Federal court order which resulted in forced busing. My efforts continue to be bent toward making a positive contribution to helping those people who are directly affected by the decision. I must act, however, in accordance with the law, and I must help them do the same."²⁷ The second was his strong commitment to the minority communities of the inner city, who appeared to be supporting busing as a last resort to end segregation in Boston. In short, Medeiros, although he understood the suffering of the working-class people of South Boston, Hyde Park, and Charlestown, was not willing to oppose a federal court order or to withdraw his support for a major objective of the city's minority community.

Other obstacles also prevented the cardinal from reaching an understanding with Boston's opponents to the church's desegregation policy. One of these was the cardinal's ethnicity. From the moment he arrived in Boston, Medeiros, a Portuguese American born in the Azores, met with resentment among many Bostonians who could not accept an archbishop who was neither a Bostonian nor, perhaps more important, Irish. As Boston School Committee member John Kerrigan bluntly put it, "I think it would be better if Medeiros wasn't from Texas and spoke English. . . . He just doesn't know Boston."²⁸

This problem was compounded by a lack of understanding among the cardinal's advisors of the feeling in Boston's white working-class neighborhoods. Almost all the cardinal's top advisors on social issues and education—Fr. John Boles, Fr. Michael Groden, Br. Varden, and Patricia Goler—were outsiders or people who had spent much of their time in the inner city rather than the surrounding white working-class neighborhoods. Although Kerrigan's analysis that the church's position was the result of "flaming-ass liberals . . . giving advice to a holy man who doesn't know the practicalities of the situation,"²⁹ was harsh, it does explain the cardinal's remarks at a 1974 news conference that he was "a bit surprised" with the opposition to forced busing and "frankly did not expect this strong opposition."³⁰

The Effectiveness of Church Policy

Despite such strong opposition, when busing was implemented in September 1974, the church's policy was clear: it would support the court order by closing the doors of its schools to refugees from busing. However, the strong opposition to this policy, the lack of a cohesive urban policy and an effective church agency to implement it, and the autonomy of local pastors would make it difficult for the church to successfully implement its policy.

Both opponents and supporters of the church's desegregation policy were critical of its initial implementation. Parent groups in white working-class neighborhoods believed that the policy violated the natural right of Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools. Desegregation supporters, citing newspaper reports based on interviews with students and teachers at Catholic schools, believed that many Boston public school students had managed to transfer to Catholic schools.

Afraid that such transfers would only resegregate Boston's schools, they accused church officials of strengthening the Catholic school system at the expense of court-ordered desegregation. However, the vehement protests of parents unable to enroll their children in Catholic schools and the enrollment figures of archdiocesan schools make their fears appear exaggerated.

The archdiocesan school office kept a close eye on the enrollments of parochial schools within the city for several reasons: it was sensitive to charges that it was taking advantage of busing to save its own schools; it was getting daily calls from Boston school officials checking on missing students; and it was scheduled to testify at Civil Rights Commission hearings in June 1975. In the fall of 1974, Fr. Boles, the archdiocesan director of education, compiled enrollment figures for schools within the city and compared enrollment figures for the beginning of the school year 1973-74 with those for 1974-75, the first year of busing. What Boles discovered was that instead of an increase in enrollment in parochial schools in the city of Boston, there had been a decrease of 908 students in the first year of desegregation, 1974-75 (see table 13.2).³¹ There were at most four schools in the city that were apparent violators of archdiocesan policy (see table 13.3).³² The question was, however, Where were all the archdiocesan students and the thousands who were leaving Boston's public schools going?

Although the majority of the archdiocese's schools followed its enrollment policies, there were several schools bordering Boston that had significant increases in enrollment and that, one could argue, served as "segregation academies" during the school desegregation process. Schools that had noticeable increases in enrollment, such as Mt. Alvernia Academy in Newton (+101), St. Mary's in Brookline (+52), St. Catherine's in Norwood (+59), and Sacred Heart in Weymouth (+88), clearly took advantage of busing to increase their enrollments. Yet it was possible to increase enrollments without violating archdiocesan policy. While the policy asked schools to be strict about transfer students, it did not place restrictions on students entering at the normal entry points, the first grade for elementary schools and ninth grade for secondary schools, since there was no way of identifying the motives of all who enrolled. In addition, the girls in many families were already attending a parochial school, and with a little extra sacrifice enough money was raised to send the boys to the same school.³³ This did not violate archdiocesan policy, which allowed students who had brothers or sisters in a

TABLE 13.2. ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON SCHOOL ENROLLMENT
BY GRADE, 1973-1976

<i>City of Boston</i>	1973-74	1974-75	1975-76
Grade K	406	486	475
1	1,810	1,839	1,906
2	1,896	1,773	1,866
3	2,031	1,866	1,911
4	2,079	1,970	1,957
5	2,204	2,009	2,051
6	2,123	2,188	2,093
7	1,812	2,072	2,075
8	2,353	1,719	2,028
Ungraded	0	132	48
TOTAL ELEMENTARY	16,813	16,051	16,410
Grade 9	2,345	2,250	1,988
10	2,304	2,336	2,218
11	2,244	2,143	2,274
12	2,120	2,139	2,057
Ungraded	1	0	0
TOTAL SECONDARY	9,014	8,868	8,537
TOTAL, ALL GRADES	25,827	24,919	24,947
<i>Outside Boston</i>			
Grade K	1,767	2,157	2,270
1	4,143	3,953	3,920
2	4,204	4,153	3,954
3	4,751	4,218	4,224
4	4,994	4,698	4,260
5	5,311	4,866	4,670
6	5,497	5,266	4,906
7	5,177	4,788	4,614
8	5,257	5,002	4,619
Ungraded	827	465	645
TOTAL ELEMENTARY	42,122	39,566	38,082
Grade 7	261	244	281
8	309	263	253
9	4,456	4,622	4,417
10	4,124	4,139	4,419
11	4,124	3,973	3,894
12	3,765	3,813	3,835
Ungraded	3	1	0
TOTAL SECONDARY	16,820	17,055	17,099
TOTAL, ALL GRADES	58,942	56,621	55,181

TABLE 13.3. ENROLLMENT OF ARCHDIOCESE SCHOOLS WITH SIGNIFICANT
INCREASES IN ENROLLMENT OR TRANSFERS, 1973-1977

	1973-74	1974-75 (Phase I)	1975-76 (Phase II)	1976-77
<i>Boston, Elementary</i>				
1. St. Brigid, South Boston	315 (-46)*	297 (-18)	347 (+50)	353 (+6)
2. St. Anthony, North End	292 (-26)	266 (-26)	290 (+24)	279 (-11)
3. St. John, North End	281 (+24)	273 (-8)	293 (+20)	285 (-8)
4. St. Anthony, Allston	401 (-6)	376 (-25)	416 (+40)	388 (-28)
5. Our Lady of Presentation, Brighton	477 (-49)	455 (-22)	528 (+73)	496 (-32)
6. St. Lazarus, East Boston	250 (+10)	248 (-2)	282 (+34)	282
7. St. Mary, East Boston	264 (-39)	251 (-13)	270 (+19)	269 (-1)
8. St. Francis de Sales, Roxbury	115 (-56)	132 (+17)	149 (+17)	142 (-7)
9. St. Peter, South Boston	258 (+18)	257 (-1)	285 (+28)	282 (-3)
10. Holy Name, West Roxbury	751 (+11)	713 (-38)	768 (+55)	771 (+3)
<i>Boston, Secondary</i>				
11. Cardinal Cushing, South Boston	586 (-124)	595 (+9)	595	535 (-60)
12. St. Dominic Savio, East Boston	349 (-8)	345 (-4)	382 (+37)	423 (+40)
13. Boston College High, Dorchester	1,103 (-4)	1,145 (+42)	1,177 (+32)	1,258 (+81)
14. Don Bosco, Boston	931 (+89)	983 (+52)	926 (-57)	823 (-103)
<i>Outside Boston, Elementary</i>				
1. St. James, Arlington	213 (+23)	213	228 (+15)	230 (+2)
2. St. Francis of Assisi, Braintree	317 (-62)	268 (-49)	296 (+28)	248 (-48)
3. St. Mary, Brookline	420 (-54)	472 (+52)	486 (+14)	491 (+5)
4. St. Rose, Chelsea	463 (-13)	495 (+32)	478 (-17)	458 (-20)
5. St. Stanislaus, Chelsea	180 (-4)	171 (-9)	245 (+74)	237 (-8)
6. Our Lady, Everett	244 (-22)	244	241 (-3)	218 (-23)
7. St. Anthony, Everett	250 (+48)	304 (+54)	340 (+36)	312 (-28)
8. Cheverus, Malden	321 (-16)	339 (+18)	338 (-1)	310 (-28)
9. Immaculate Conception, Malden	534 (-71)	501 (-33)	563 (+62)	502 (-61)
10. St. Joseph, Needham	428 (+57)	411 (-17)	467 (+56)	427 (-40)
11. Mt. Alvernia Academy, Newton	202 (-8)	303 (+101)	302 (-1)	295 (-7)
12. Newton Catholic, Newton	424 (+47)	388 (-36)	433 (+45)	393 (-40)
13. St. John, Newton	173 (-8)	146 (-27)	171 (+25)	156 (-15)
14. St. Catherine, Norwood	704 (-105)	763 (+59)	828 (+65)	803 (-25)
15. St. Joseph, Quincy	215 (-18)	198 (-17)	219 (+21)	234 (+15)
16. St. Mary, Quincy	259 (-18)	276 (+17)	275 (-1)	257 (-18)
17. Little Flower, Somerville	404 (-23)	401 (-3)	489 (+88)	434 (-55)
18. St. Ann, Somerville	369 (-82)	336 (-33)	381 (+45)	365 (-18)
19. St. Anthony, Somerville	231 (-17)	207 (-24)	248 (+41)	241 (-7)
20. St. Polycarp, Somerville	228 (-16)	225 (-3)	254 (+29)	246 (-8)
21. Blessed Sacrament, Walpole	402 (+12)	389 (-13)	423 (+34)	421 (-2)
22. Rosary Academy, Watertown	132 (-57)	167 (+35)	235 (+68)	202 (-33)

TABLE 13.3. (CONTINUED)

	1973-74	1974-75 (Phase I)	1975-76 (Phase II)	1976-77
23. St. Patrick, Watertown	315 (-27)	262 (-53)	300 (+38)	288 (-12)
24. St. John, Wellesley	137 (-10)	138 (+1)	159 (+21)	158 (-1)
25. St. Paul, Wellesley	194 (-20)	219 (+25)	237 (+18)	243 (+6)
26. Sacred Heart, Weymouth	536 (+11)	569 (+33)	568 (-1)	557 (-11)
<i>Outside Boston, Secondary</i>				
27. St. Mary, Brookline	330 (+20)	359 (+29)	339 (-20)	311 (-28)
28. Matignon, Cambridge	608 (-19)	631 (+23)	674 (+43)	683 (+9)
29. North Cambridge Catholic, Cambridge	230 (-32)	252 (+22)	242 (-10)	236 (-10)
30. Ursuline Academy, Dedham	340 (-1)	358 (+18)	385 (+27)	391 (+6)
31. Academy of Notre Dame, Hingham	305 (+36)	319 (+14)	387 (+68)	403 (+16)
32. Immaculate Conception, Malden	230 (+8)	246 (+1)	266 (+20)	253 (-13)
33. Sacred Heart, Weymouth	283 (+3)	338 (+5)	376 (+38)	376

*Figures in parentheses are differences in enrollment from the previous school year.

school to transfer to that school. As Dr. Louis Perullo, director of attendance for the Boston public schools, noted, there was also not much the archdiocese could do about families who used suburban addresses, oftentimes of close relatives, as a ploy to gain admittance to a parochial school.³⁴

In response to enrollment increase during the first year of desegregation, the archdiocesan board of education attempted to tighten its transfer policy by keeping a closer eye on suburban schools. However, it also allowed schools to accept transfers to replace students who had dropped out or transferred to other schools. There was concern that this new policy was easily subject to abuse or misinterpretation. For example, a school now had the right to fill a vacancy, but was it a vacancy from last year or five years ago? Indeed, this new transfer policy and the implementation of the second phase of busing (in the school year 1975-76), which increased the number of citizens affected, did lead to an increase in the number of schools that opened their doors to students escaping busing, most significantly not in the suburbs, but in Boston.

Although the total population of archdiocesan schools decreased by 1,412 students from 1974-75 to 1975-76 (see table 13.1), in the city of Boston a dozen archdiocesan schools, including St. Brigid's (+50) and St. Peter's (+28) in South Boston, had significant increases in enrollment (see table 13.3), and total enrollment for Boston's parochial schools increased by 28 students. This increase was achieved by admitting 1,207

transfer students from Boston's public schools, mostly into grades 2 through 6 (see table 13.2), which would imply that parents were attempting to protect younger children from the perceived dangers of being bused to schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods. However, because schools were allowed to replace dropouts or transfers, which numbered 1,209, and to accept minority students, who composed 20 percent of the transfers from Boston's public schools, most of the parochial schools adhered closely to archdiocesan policy.³⁵ However, as many as twenty-five schools in Boston's near suburbs experienced significant enrollment increases, perhaps as many as 1,100, which also appeared to come in large part from Boston transfers.³⁶ These figures provide further support for the argument that some archdiocesan schools took advantage of busing to increase their enrollments. However, it was a small minority of the archdiocese's schools. There were 181 archdiocesan schools in 1974-75 and yet only 16, or 8.8 percent, appeared to have used the busing crisis to enhance their enrollments significantly. Although this number increased to 35 in 1975-76, it represented only 19.3 percent of archdiocesan schools.

Still, there were enough violations of the transfer policy to warrant Cardinal Medeiros's sending a letter to several schools, informing them of their violation and ordering them to cease. The fact that Medeiros could not take any punitive action underscored one of the major problems he faced in attempting to implement his desegregation policy: the independence of the parishes. As Medeiros told the United States Civil Rights Commission, each of Boston's parishes was autonomous, and he had "no coercive powers, only moral powers" over them.³⁷

The number of obvious violations of school policy decreased dramatically in 1976, with many schools losing a significant number of students (see table 13.3), and the figures for 1976 showed a continuing decrease in archdiocesan enrollments, with a total loss of 2,619 students (see table 13.1). The new archdiocesan school superintendent, Fr. Eugene Sullivan, also noted a decline in applications for transfers compared with the previous years during busing, an indication that the issue was dying.³⁸

Although there was no doubt that a few schools did stabilize their enrollments by accepting transfers from Boston's public schools and that there was some underreporting of the number of Boston residents by suburban parochial schools, other significant factors led to a stabilization

of parochial school enrollments.³⁹ These factors included an increase in professional planning, which made clearer the responsibilities of the various educational agencies of the archdiocese; the acceptance that schools could be staffed mostly by lay teachers and remain Catholic; and the increasing affluence of Catholics, which made them better able to support schools with lay staffs. Many schools also launched aggressive enrollment campaigns, which in several instances led to significant increases in enrollment. The most successful example, Central Catholic High School, in Lawrence (unaffected by the Boston situation), increased its enrollment by 161 students between 1973 and 1975. Several school closings increased the enrollments of neighboring schools, since close to 50 percent of students affected by the closings transferred to other Catholic schools.⁴⁰ Before, during, and after court-ordered desegregation of Boston's public schools, the highest priority of Catholic educators was to keep their schools open. By 1976 their efforts appeared to be showing positive results.

The degree of adherence to the church's school policy was of the utmost importance to the success or failure of the desegregation of Boston's public schools. Much of the criticism of mandatory busing focused on its potential to cause white flight from the beleaguered schools, which would only result in resegregation of the cities. An important element in white flight was the extent of pupil transfers to private schools during the first years of desegregation.

In Boston the potential for white flight was quite high because many of the ingredients for it were present: a large, urban public school district with a significant proportion of minority students (42 percent), a high proportion of Catholics among the white population, overwhelmingly white suburban school districts, a desegregation plan limited to the central city, a significant proportion of white students assigned to the busing program, and an archdiocesan school system in the midst of a ten-year period of decline.⁴¹ It is, however, very difficult to determine the exact effect that parochial schools had on the implementation of school desegregation in Boston in part because of the questionable accuracy of enrollment and transfer figures for some of the archdiocesan schools, but especially for the Boston public schools.

While it can be determined with reasonable certainty that from 1974 to 1976 close to 2,500 white students transferred to parochial schools from Boston's public schools, it is impossible to get an accurate figure of

the total number of white students who left the Boston public schools during this period. Official figures indicate a loss of 9,929 white students from 1974 to 1976. But some of those closely involved in the desegregation process maintain that enrollment figures prior to 1975 were inflated and that the loss of white students may have been as low as 5,000.⁴² Yet this means that Boston's parochial schools absorbed between 25 and 50 percent of the white students who fled busing. A study of white residents in a sample of Boston neighborhoods who withdrew their children from Boston's public schools because of busing found that 55 percent transferred their children to parochial schools and remained residents of Boston, while 45 percent moved to the suburbs to escape busing. These figures have been interpreted by some to indicate that parochial schools could be seen as retardants to residential relocation. As already stated, there were certainly parochial schools, especially those bordering Boston, that took advantage of busing to significantly increase their enrollments. Schools such as Rosary Academy, in Watertown, Mt. Alvernia Academy, in Newton, Sacred Heart, in Weymouth, and Little Flower, in Somerville, would be labeled by some "segregation academies." And there were indeed pastors, such as Msgr. John Hogan of the Little Flower School, who were quite open in their defiance of archdiocesan school policy, announcing that they would admit any child from nearby Boston neighborhoods into their schools.⁴³ These schools, however, were a distinct minority of archdiocesan schools, the overwhelming majority of which adhered to the archdiocesan policy.

The Church and Desegregation

Aside from enrollment and transfer policies, archdiocesan school officials and church activists were also concerned about the lack of minority students and teachers in parochial schools, which in 1974-75 had 4,029 minority students, or 4.9 percent of their total enrollment.⁴⁴ It was very difficult for the church not to appear hypocritical in its support for the desegregation of Boston's public schools if its own schools were de facto segregated. Accordingly, in February 1975 the archdiocesan board of education launched a campaign to explore the possibility of further integrating parochial schools. As part of this campaign, Superintendent Varden

sent a survey to all archdiocesan schools in an attempt to discover where there were empty seats, how much it would cost to fill them with minority students, and, by requiring the signature of both the pastor and principal, where there was support for such an effort. Although archdiocesan schools were far from integrated, some notable successes, such as St. Gregory's in Dorchester, resulted from this effort.

Ironically, the church's support for black community parish schools in Roxbury created a potentially embarrassing situation. These schools attracted black students from all areas of the city, were close to 100 percent nonwhite, and fostered a black nationalist philosophy that opposed integration. In January 1976 Patricia Goler warned Fr. Boles that the existence of such schools was "an apparent dichotomy of the cardinal's support for integrated public schools" and could be used against the cardinal if it became public knowledge. She also suggested that "carrots" be offered to black schools to encourage them to integrate.⁴⁵ At the time, Fr. Boles decided to maintain the status quo and gamble, correctly as it turned out, that this would not become an issue.

It was, however, not clear at the time of busing whether Catholic schools should be integrated if they were not already. Several black community leaders, such as state representative Melvin King, supported an increase in the number of black students attending Catholic schools. Others, however, were asking questions such as: Are Catholic schools inherently unequal if they are segregated? Is the best way to serve the black community through the integration of Catholic schools? (Most had few black students who were Catholic, and most were located in the inner city.) Would the meager integration of Catholic schools, because of their small number of black students, take away blacks' control of their own future and destiny? Rather than waste energy attempting to integrate schools artificially, it seemed like it might be more fruitful to expend energy to demonstrate that an all-black school could be as fine as any other schools of high quality.

The church, faced with a variety of external and internal pressures, achieved mixed results in its attempt to implement its transfer policy and to integrate its schools. As noted previously, there is no doubt that some diocesan schools took advantage of court-ordered desegregation to stabilize their enrollments, and that there was not much Cardinal Medeiros or other church officials could do to stop them. It is also true that archdiocesan schools remained segregated, not only because there had

never been a sincere effort to desegregate them, but also because there was no consensus in the minority community or the church hierarchy that integrated Catholic schools were desirable.

At the same time, the large majority of Catholic schools adhered to the church's transfer policy. It was, one could argue, surprising and laudable that so many schools resisted temptation and supported the policy, despite intense criticism of the policy within their church communities, their own enrollment problems, and the reality that the cardinal could not force them to do so. Although the church was devoted to keeping Catholic schools open, it would not be at the expense of the effort to desegregate Boston's public schools.

Notes

1. *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F.Supp. 410 (D.Mass. 1974), *aff'd sub nom. Morgan v. Kerrigan*, 509 F.2d 580 (1st Cir. 1974), *cert. denied*, 421 U.S. 963 (1975).
2. "Cardinal's Statement on Schools," *Pilot* (Boston), 23 November 1973, 14.
3. Interview, 1 July 1987, with Dr. Patricia A. Goler, chairwoman of the Commission on Human Rights, 1971-1976, and former member of the archdiocesan board of education.
4. Nick King and John B. Wood, "Cardinal Says Garrity Ruling Fulfills His Hopes," *Boston Globe*, 1 July 1974, 4.
5. Rhoda Goldstein, "Enrollment: Facts and Forecast," *Momentum* 8, no. 2 (May 1977): 4; Rev. Francis J. Rimkus, "The Future of the Archdiocesan School System," *Pilot*, 19 August 1972, Back-to-School Section, 2.
6. James T. Hannon, "The Influence of Catholic Schools on the Desegregation of Public School Systems: A Case Study of White Flight in Boston," *Population Research and Policy Review* 3 (1984): 221.
7. John Deedy, "News and Views," *Commonweal* (6 December 1974): 226.
8. Directives to Central High Schools, Director of Education file, 1972-1973, RG V.033, Archives, Archdiocese of Boston (hereafter AABo).
9. Rev. John Boles to School Board, April 30, 1973, and May 7, 1973, Director of Education file, 1972-1973.
10. Interview, 31 July 1986, with Br. Bartholomew Varden, C.F.X., Superintendent of Schools, 1972-1976; Rimkus, "Future," 2.
11. 1973 Budget review, St. Francis de Sales, Roxbury, parish file, RG IV.A.048, AABo.
12. Kay Longcope, "The Cardinal and Desegregation," *Boston Evening Globe*, 9 July 1974, 29. See also Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 71-87.

13. Goler interview.
14. Michael True, "The Last Resort in Boston," *Commonweal* (25 October 1974): 77.
15. Minutes of the Board of Education Meeting, 3 March 1975, Boston School Integration Problems file, RG III.J.07.02, AABo.
16. Varden interview.
17. "Board of Education Publishes Guidelines on School Imbalance," *Pilot*, 1 March 1974, 1.
18. "The Court's Order," *Pilot*, 28 June 1974, 4.
19. Maurice deG. Ford, "Busing in Boston," *Commonweal* (10 October 1975): 456-60; John C. Cort, "Black and White in Boston," *Commonweal* (31 January 1975): 355-57; "Busing Is Part of the Answer," *America* (24 January 1976): 45.
20. Philip F. Zucchi, "South Boston: What Hath Busing Wrought?" *Triumph* (December 1974): 12.
21. James Carroll, "Busing and Novak," *National Catholic Reporter* (5 September 1975): 13; Michael Novak, "Busing: Immoral?" *National Catholic Reporter* (26 September 1975): 16.
22. Interview, 13 August 1986, with Msgr. Francis J. Lally, one of Cardinal Cushing's closest aides and late member of the U.S. Catholic Conference.
23. Rick Casey, "Boston Order Splits Catholics," *National Catholic Reporter* (21 February 1975): 1.
24. Antibusing Letter to Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, 20 September 1975, Busing file, RG I.09, AABo.
25. Mock criminal complaint against Cardinal Medeiros by ROAR, 2 February 1976, Desegregation Boston Schools file, RG I.09, AABo.
26. Interview, 6 August 1986, with Rev. John Boles, Director of Education, 1972-1976.
27. Cardinal Medeiros in Response to Antibusing Letter, 20 September 1975, Busing file, AABo.
28. Casey, "Boston Order," 6.
29. Ibid.
30. "Cardinal Backs Principles in Racial Balance Plan," *Pilot*, 20 December 1974, 1; Lally interview. Lally believed Medeiros was not given good advice on how to handle South Boston and, according to Dr. Goler, made two trips from Washington, D.C., to meet with Goler and Medeiros to discuss church desegregation policy.
31. Figures in table 13.2 are taken from summaries of the annual survey done by the Boston archdiocese for the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). One can get some indication of the number of transfers to Catholic schools by comparing enrollments in each grade with those of the grade below it for the preceding year.
32. Figures in table 13.3 are also from the annual NCEA survey. There are three ways to identify schools that took advantage of busing to enhance their

enrollments. One, used by the archdiocese, was a 5 percent increase in enrollment over a one-year period. A second method is to identify schools that had large increases in a specific class from one year to the next. For example, although the enrollment of Cardinal Cushing High School increased by only nine students in 1974, the tenth grade class had twenty-two more students than the previous year's ninth grade, the eleventh grade an additional twenty-one. A third indicator is a large decrease in enrollment the year after a sudden increase, which most likely resulted from students dropping out after using the parochial school as a temporary haven from busing.

33. Varden interview. According to Varden, in 1973, 42 percent of families with a student enrolled in a parochial school also had a child in public school.

34. Tom Sheehan, "Parochial Schools: Who's Transferring—and to Where?" *Boston Phoenix*, 14 October 1975, 32.

35. "Catholic Schools Adhere to Enrollment Guidelines," *Pilot*, 11 November 1975, 1. In this article Varden cited figures that would put the number of transfers from Boston public schools to archdiocesan schools for 1975 at 2,258. Subtracting approximately 250 minority transfer students, this would put the number of white transfer students at 2,000.

36. Hannon, "Influence," 228. Hannon, in contrast to Varden, estimated that the number of white transfers from Boston public schools for both 1974 and 1975 was 2,000. Since there appear to have been close to 500 transfers in 1974 alone, and the archdiocese cited transfers of close to 2,000 for 1975, it would appear that close to 2,500 white students transferred from Boston's public schools to archdiocesan schools in 1974 and 1975.

37. Arthur Jones, "Clergymen Promise to Take Greater Role in Desegregation," *Boston Globe*, 18 June 1975, 8.

38. "School Statistics for 1976-77 Show General Decrease," *Pilot*, 3 December 1976, 1.

39. Goldstein, "Enrollment," 4. A study done by the NCEA in 1977 found that the rate of decline in Catholic school enrollment nationwide had slowed to 0.9 percent in 1976-77. The stabilization of enrollments in many schools of the Boston archdiocese was, in part, a reflection of this nationwide trend.

40. "Conference Examines Future Role and Needs of Schools," *Pilot*, 21 November 1975, 8; Boles interview; Varden interview; Joseph Berger, "Being Catholic in America," *New York Times Magazine* (23 August 1987): 64.

41. Hannon, "Influence," 220-21.

42. Christine H. Rossell, "Boston's Desegregation and White Flight," *Integrated Education* (January/February 1977): 36-39. Rossell notes that court-appointed expert Robert Dentler maintained that enrollment was inflated prior to 1975 and that the loss in that year may be mainly due to the difference between inflated enrollment in the prior years and real enrollment in 1975.

43. Robert Reinhold, "Many Boston Students Switch to Parochial Schools," *New York Times*, 10 September 1975, 5. See also J. Anthony Lukas, *Common*

Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families (New York: Knopf, 1985), 399–401.

44. Br. Bartholomew Varden, C.F.X., to Colleagues, 28 February 1975, Superintendent of Schools file, 1972–1975, RG V.033, AABo.

45. Boles interview.

Afterword



THOMAS H. O'CONNOR

*M*ANY YEARS AGO, soon after beginning my work as a graduate student in history, I encountered the German word *festschrift*. Having no idea what the word meant, I went to a dictionary and discovered it referred to a volume of learned articles, essays, and the like, "contributed by colleagues and admirers as a tribute, especially to a scholar." I thought at the time that this was a wonderful idea, and now that I find myself the recipient of such a touching tribute from a group of colleagues and former students, I am even more impressed by the way in which such a warm gesture captures the true spirit of friendship and collegiality.

During my formative years as a graduate student, the emphasis in our courses on methodology was on the importance of written documents as the essential ingredients for historical research. Those were the times when most history was written, as they said, from "the top down," reflecting the written sources set down by those who had the time, the money, the education, the power, and the position to prepare them. It was a familiar route that I followed as an aspiring scholar, starting out with a study of the textile manufacturers of Massachusetts—the Lawrences, the Lowells, the Appletons—people who left behind detailed written records of their accomplishments.

Some time later, I explored the life of John Bernard Fitzpatrick, the third Catholic bishop of Boston, who corresponded with Yankee mill owners concerning the welfare of Irish immigrant workers. Once again I had access to written documents not only from the mill owners, but also from the bishop himself. As I closed down the book on the bishop, and followed his funeral cortege in 1866 from downtown Boston, across the Dover Street Bridge to the historic St. Augustine Cemetery, I de-

cided to find out more about South Boston—a neighborhood where I was born and raised but one about whose history I knew very little. Early histories of the Peninsula District provided me with records, deeds, land titles, and other documents, but as I moved into the latter parts of the nineteenth century, I found myself increasingly frustrated by an expanding Irish Catholic community, which seemed to be far more comfortable with the spoken word than the written record.

The Irish are often celebrated for their colorful stories, delightful anecdotes, and imaginative literature. Unfortunately, however, little of this oral tradition provided much factual history. As a result of famine, depression, and despair, many Irish could see little worth in remembering, much less recounting, the shameful and humiliating experiences that led them to abandon their homeland and immigrate to America. Reticent about revealing their innermost feelings, the Boston Irish left few detailed written records and personal memoirs so essential to the historian. Time and time again in researching the political history of the Boston Irish, I found that the documents I wanted simply did not exist—even for significant political or ecclesiastical figures who guided and directed their immigrant constituents into the twentieth century.

Undoubtedly this absence of traditional sources helps explain the paucity of studies dealing with the social and political history of the Boston Irish. At the time he published his pioneering work in 1941, called *Boston's Immigrants*, Oscar Handlin acutely observed that at that time neither urban nor ethnic history had yet formed “discrete fields of inquiry or teaching subjects.” The complex history of the Irish in a city like Boston, however, seemed too significant to be ignored and too fascinating to be neglected. I found the struggle of an immigrant people to achieve social acceptance, economic survival, and political expression in a totally hostile environment too engrossing a topic to ignore. Largely using interviews with persons whose memories went well back into the early years of the twentieth century and local newspapers, which recorded the everyday events of daily life, I set about trying to formulate a synthesis that would form the basis for future research in those areas of ethnic and urban history to which Handlin referred more than half a century earlier. The character of the neighborhoods in which the Irish lived, the churches in which they worshiped, the occupations at which they worked, the political organizations for which they labored, and the impact they had upon the life of the city were the kinds of topics that seemed most relevant to me at the time.

There was a period in early American history when English literary critics could sneer at the improbability of anyone reading "an American book." There was also a time, much later, when most American publishers found it difficult to imagine turning out a book about everyday life in a working-class Irish Catholic neighborhood. I will forever be grateful to William Frohlich, director of Northeastern University Press, for having the courage and foresight to publish my work *South Boston: My Home Town*. He not only recognized the life of the immigrant community as an appropriate subject for serious historical research, but also encouraged me to pursue other topics related to the Boston community. As my good friend and longtime colleague Sam Bass Warner Jr. has observed in his generous and perceptive overview of my work, I have tried to explore the many ways in which the various newcomers to Boston—so often despised and rejected—eventually became not only integrated into the community, but in many ways essential to its very survival. During the Civil War, for example, the Irish fought gallantly and effectively in the armed services of the United States to save the Union and preserve the Constitution. And during the 1960s, Bostonians of Irish background provided the critical leadership that helped the city escape bankruptcy and ruin, paving the way for the "New Boston."

In recent years, the study and writing of history changed from the old top-down process to a new, bottom-up approach. Young scholars have developed a great interest in the lives and accomplishments of people who had been largely overlooked by their older colleagues—communities considered insignificant because they left no permanent records. Not only were the stories of Irish immigrants left untold, but also those of laborers and politicians, sailors and shopkeepers, housewives and domestics, African Americans and Native Americans, Latino Americans and Asian Americans. For the most part, their history simply faded into the background, unnoticed and unrecorded. But those were precisely the kind of people the new generation of young historians wanted to know about, and they were not deterred because of the lack of traditional sources. Historians, librarians, and archivists became much more inventive, even ingenious, in locating the kinds of primary source materials with which to reconstruct the lives and accomplishments of the undocumented.

It is this research into the history of the often unknown and largely unrecorded aspects of Boston history that makes this particular collection of essays so personally satisfying and professionally gratifying. The

story of the Irish continues, of course, but it is revealed in a sophisticated manner that displays highly diversified patterns of research. Larry Kennedy's piece on how the Irish Home Rule issue influenced the course of late-nineteenth-century Irish politics in Boston, for example, offers a fascinating background for Jim Connolly's analysis of the various ways in which the classic novel *The Last Hurrah* reflected the nature of Boston political life in the 1950s. Religion is always an important influence in a Catholic city like Boston, and Jim O'Toole's story of a downtown Irish parish whose pastor was an African American priest has provided an unusual and somewhat unexpected account of early ethnic-racial relations. Kristen Petersen's work on religious conversion among immigrants at the turn of the century offers new insights into the social and psychological effects of religion. William Leonard's work on the racial views of Catholics during the school desegregation period contributes a thoughtful perspective on a complex and bitter social issue, while James Glinski's revisionist study of parochial school admissions during the busing crisis adds an important corrective to recent studies on a controversial subject.

Several of the essays depart from the usual studies of an essentially homogeneous community by reflecting demographic changes in Boston and the diversification of the city's population. James and Lois Horton have provided a remarkable and absorbing study of successful African American men and women in Boston in the years before the Civil War. Judith Giesberg has concentrated on the history of women in early Boston and has used court records extensively to document their legal struggles during the Civil War period. Sarah Deutsch, on the other hand, has moved on from her own previous research on the role of women in Boston during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to analyze interracial sexuality within the ranks of the city's NAACP movement.

Politics in Boston continues to attract a strong academic interest, and in his study of capital punishment in the early days of the Republic, Alan Rogers has delved into the ways in which conflicting themes of human rights and property rights influenced the legal process. Albert von Frank has written about the ways in which the print culture of Boston dealt with the theme of radical abolitionism in the period before the Civil War, and David Quigley has explored the influence of Charles Sumner and the manner in which the continuing varieties of radicalism influenced the Boston political culture in the years following the end of the war. And an analysis of a famous court case allows Mark Gelfand to

follow the transformation of legal and financial elites in Boston during the early twentieth century.

The range, the diversity, and the significance of the essays in this volume are an exciting tribute to the intellectual creativity of the individual authors as well as to the continued vibrancy of a city that belies its age through continuous renewal. I am very grateful that so many young friends and colleagues feel that in some way my own works have helped to provide a starting point from which they have explored new sources and investigated different themes in order to expand the study of Boston's social, ethnic, and religious history well beyond previous boundaries. I have no doubt that these marvelous essays will, in turn, stimulate yet another generation of historians to employ even more sophisticated techniques to extend the boundaries of Boston's long and fascinating history even further.

Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

December 9, 2002

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The Heritage of the American People, 1965.

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